Entertainment WEEKLY
#970 • DECEMBER 21, 2007

TITANIC
10 YEARS LATER

Meet Our New Columnist:
'Juno' Screenwriter
DIABLO CODY

Tom & Julia

CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR

He's in a Hot Tub, She's In a Bikini—the Things You Do to Sell a War Movie!

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EXCLUSIVE
WESLEY SNIPES ON HIS BIZARRE DOWNFALL & UPCOMING TRIAL
By Chris Nashawaty

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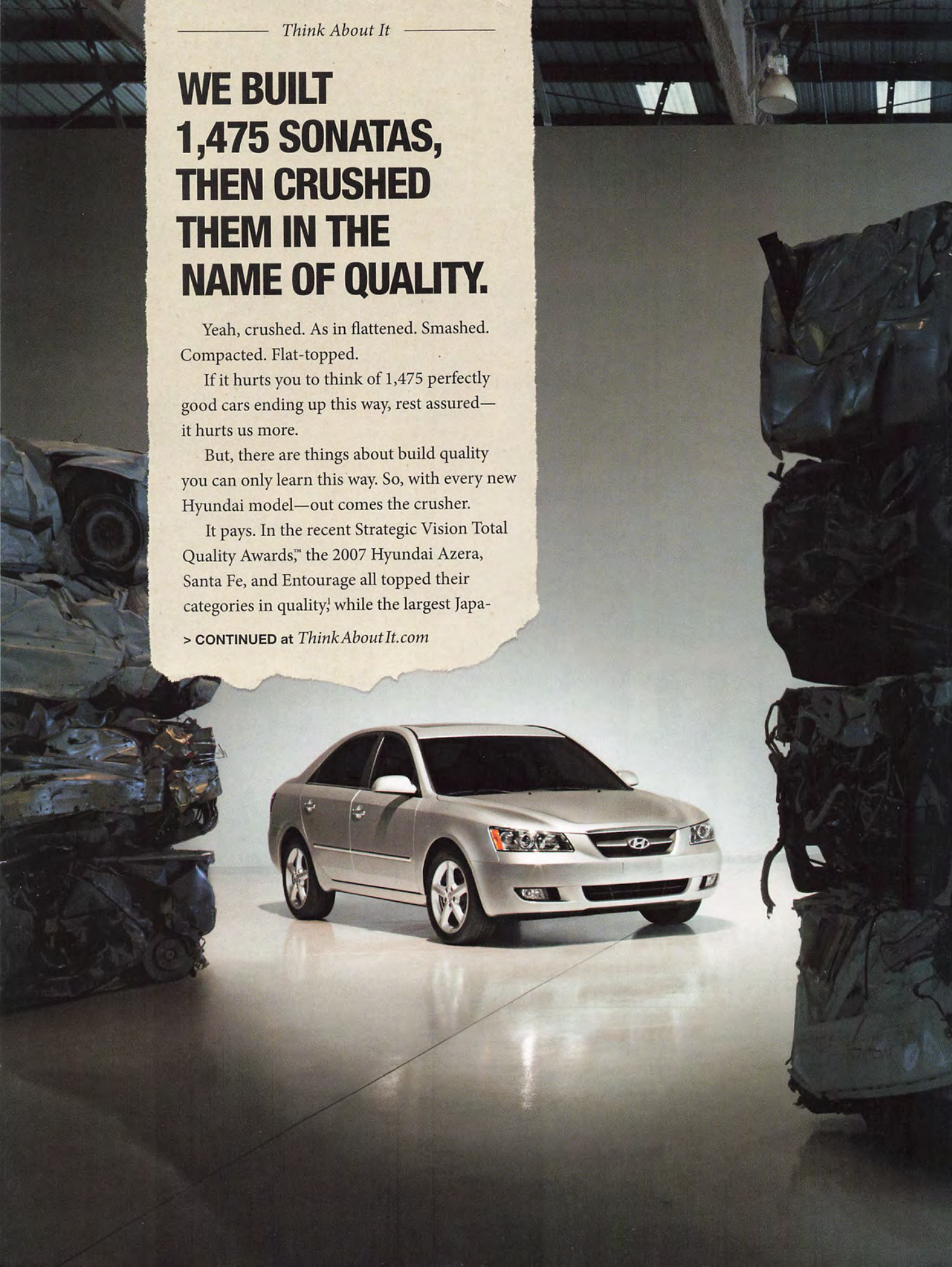

[1]The 2007 Hyundai Entourage was a Winner in Strategic Vision's 2007 Total Quality Award℠ as a 3-Way Tie for Best Minivan Experience. Strategic Vision's 2007 Vehicle Experience Study℠ surveyed 27,780 Oct.– Nov. new vehicle buyers after the first 90 days of ownership. Hyundai is a registered trademark of Hyundai Motor America. All rights reserved. ©2007 Hyundai Motor America.

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Contents

DECEMBER 21, 2007

Departments

4 **EDITOR'S LETTER**

6 **FEEDBACK**

11 **THE SCENE**
From L.A.'s premiere of *Atonement* to an after-party for *P.S. I Love You*.

14 **NEWS + NOTES**
Titanic, 10 years later...*The Hills* finale... *Golden Compass* loses its way at the box office...Hit List...Hollywood Insider...

53 **THE MUST LIST**

90 **BINGE THINKING**
Diablo Cody reflects on her *Juno* press tour.

Features

28 **War Games**
Julia Roberts and Tom Hanks finally meet on screen, mixing covert sex and ops in *Charlie Wilson's War*, the latest film to take on global politics. BY BENJAMIN SVETKEY

38 **The Pussycat With Nine Lives**
Pussycat Doll Nicole Scherzinger was set to unveil her solo CD this year. Three release dates passed, yet her label insists she's a star. Will the public ever agree? BY TIM STACK

44 **The Trials of Wesley Snipes**
Once heralded for his butt-kicking roles, Snipes is now waging a new fight. The actor speaks candidly about allegations of tax fraud. BY CHRIS NASHAWATY

Reviews

54 **Movies**
Sweeney Todd, *Charlie Wilson's War*, *I Am Legend*, *The Kite Runner*, and more.

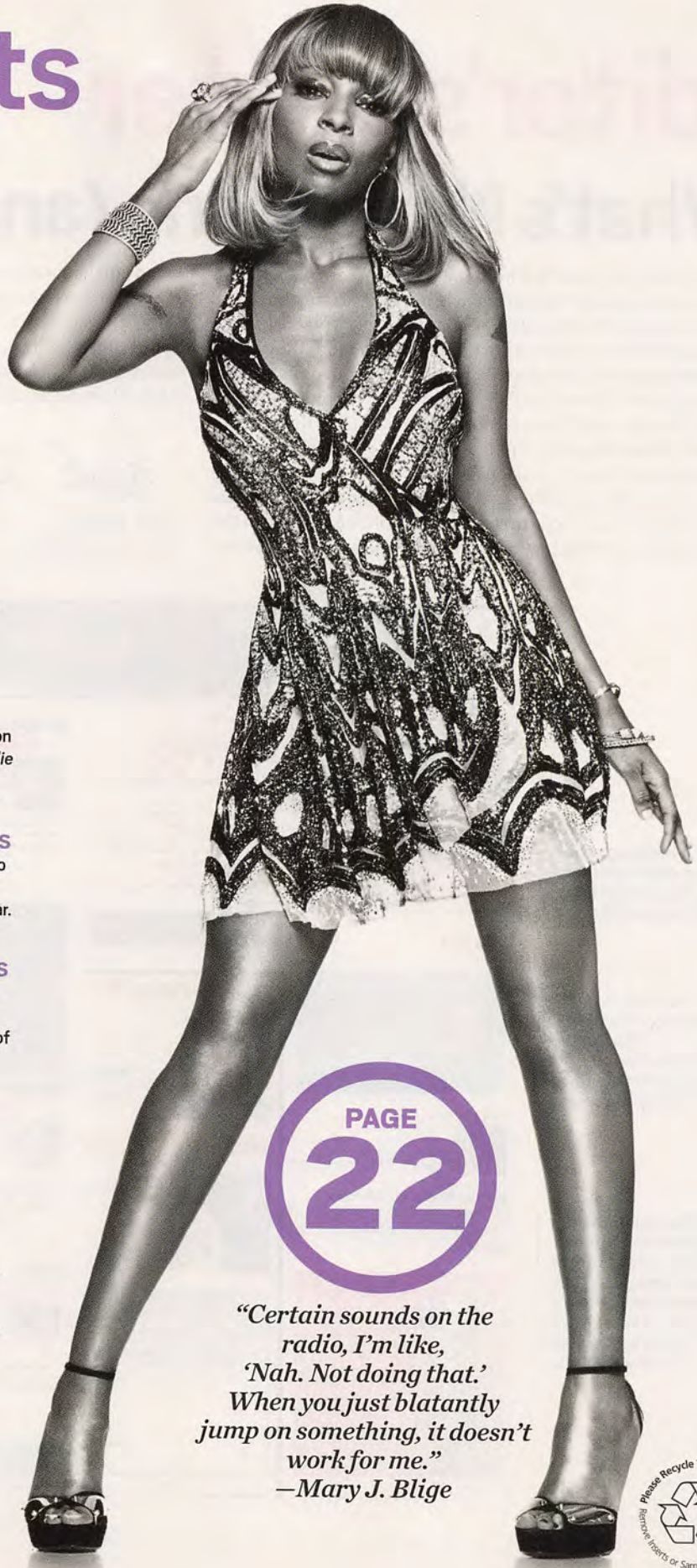
60 **DVD**
Once, *Blade Runner*, *The Simpsons Movie*...

67 **Television**
Our staff's top 10 episodes of 2007, Snoop Dogg's reality show, What to Watch...

74 **Music**
EW's Grammy playlist, Lupe Fiasco...

78 **Books**
Susanna Sonnenberg, new thrillers...

ON THE COVER
Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts photographed exclusively for EW by Brigitte Lacombe on Nov. 14, 2007, in Chicago



PAGE 22

"Certain sounds on the radio, I'm like, 'Nah. Not doing that.' When you just blatantly jump on something, it doesn't work for me."
—Mary J. Blige

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(COVER) STYLING: APRIL JOHNSON; ROBERTS' HAIR: SERGE NORMANT/JED ROOT; MAKEUP: LAURA MERCIER/JED ROOT; HANKS' GROOMING: CATHY DAVIS; ROBERTS' SWEATER: GIORGIO ARMANI; HANKS' SWEATER: JOHN VARVATOS; (THIS PAGE) © MR PHOTO/CORBIS OUTLINE

Editor's Letter

What's New Online (and in Print)

We've just redesigned the homepage of EW.com. The goal is simple: make it easier for you to navigate the best entertainment website around (see below). EW.com will keep you current on breaking Hollywood news, with updates throughout the day. It's the perfect place to plan your TV viewing, with our daily picks of the night's best shows. And all the stuff you've come to expect from EW.com—fun lists, reader polls, photo galleries, and exclusive interviews with top stars—is now just a click away from the homepage. Please log on and check it out!

In print, we've got something brand-new, too—*Juno* screenwriter Diablo Cody, whose first back-page column appears in this issue. She'll be writing regularly about the ins and outs of Hollywood and about pop culture from the unique point of view of a rising star who's very much in the game, but who's also a huge fan. (You can read Karen Valby's great Holiday Movie Preview story about her at *ew.com/diablo*.) Diablo's first piece is about the insanity of the *Juno* press junket, and why it didn't live up to her *Almost Famous* dreams—I hope you find it as much of a kick as I do.

Rick Tetzeli

Rick Tetzeli
Managing Editor

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FROM ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY
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Paul Rudd starring in "I Love You"
Nicolas Cage tapped for "Knowing"
TCA cancels winter press tour
Joan Allen joins Richard Gere in "Dog's Story"
Led Zeppelin plays reunion show in London
DirecTV pulls the plug on "Passions"
ABC cancels "Big Shots"
EW.com Poll: Do celebs affect your vote?
Get the Latest
Checking in with Jay-Z
Exclusive: The artist and Def Jam prez on his label's 26 Grammy nods and his ongoing contract negotiations
HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE
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TV WATCH
"The Hills" finale recap: Second chances
"The Amazing Race" recap: Relationship lessons
"Grey's Anatomy" recap: Bloody good
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TRUTH, RUMORS & EXCLUSIVES
PopWatch
KEEPING AN EYE ON POP CULTURE
MOVIES
Paul Rudd starring in "I Love You"
Spock 2.0 beams down at EW
Joan Allen joins Richard Gere in "Dog's Story"
L.A. Film Critics award Anderson's "Blood"
THE LISTS
ENTERTAINERS OF THE YEAR
TODAY'S MOST POPULAR
MUSIC
Checking in with Jay-Z
Led Zeppelin plays reunion show in London
Grammy nominees to watch
9 hot gifts for rock fans
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Oprah Winfrey has hit the road to campaign for Barack Obama. Do celebrity endorsements affect how you vote?
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Our roundup of the top entertainment news is updated throughout the day.

Here's where you'll find a recap of the latest episode of your favorite TV show—plus our picks for this evening's best bets and the latest TV-related news.

Our daily original video programming—first looks, behind-the-scenes exclusives, interviews with A-list stars.

We're breaking news 24/7, on the Hollywood Insider blog. Keep tabs on the very latest developments in the writers' strike, casting news, and more.

Whether you're looking for a great movie musical, the worst sequels of all time, or a quick review of Daniel Craig's greatest roles, you'll find it in our deep archive of lists.

Our PopWatch blog doesn't make the news, it just makes fun of it. Michael Slezak, Gary Susman, Mandi Bierly, Annie Barrett, and our other writers put the latest entertainment hiccups and high jinks in unique and often hilarious perspective.

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Feedback

"I think it's fair to say that 2007 has truly been the year of J.K. Rowling. She certainly deserves the recognition."
Leah Randall
Kennesaw, Ga.

That's Entertainment!

As a die-hard Potterphile, I am speechless with glee over your choice for Entertainer of the Year. I'm not surprised, of course: J.K. Rowling has been one of the most brilliant and influential figures of the past decade. You have made at least one reader very, very happy.

Allyson Gronowitz
Teaneck, N.J.

The Harry Potter books are interesting reads, but you've blown them out of proportion. Yes, J.K. Rowling should be commended for inspiring more children to read. But ultimately, they're just books.

Lance Berry
Ashburn, Va.

Thanks for including Gerard Butler on your list. This tremendously talented actor is not only conquering the world of film, he can also slay a talk-show audience with his wit and charm. Keep the buzz going loud and strong!

Grace Young
Phoenix

While you made some great choices (Tina Fey, Vanessa Williams), I was shocked by certain oversights. Where was Ellen DeGeneres? And what about the ladies of *The View*? No show captured America's attention this year like it did.

Matthew Cormier
North Scituate, R.I.

S.O.Wes

I appreciated the "Save This Career!" commentary on Wes Bentley (News & Notes). In college, I'd scour the Internet for any information about him. As time passed and the news dried up, I moved on. Seeing this gives me hope that producers may rediscover him.

Jennifer Rokasky
Woodbridge, Va.

Belle of the Ball

What? No mention of Hermione's "top of the stairs" moment in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Style)? When she turned the corner in that pink gown, she went from a frizzy-haired brainiac to a true young woman.

Jessica Richards
League City, Tex.

Death Becomes Them

You missed the most significant death scene of all time (The Glutton). How could anyone forget the funeral pyre for Darth Vader in *Return of the Jedi*? It was gooey and sad, human yet otherworldly. Death doesn't get much better than this.

Ed Wahl
Fillmore, Calif.

Why didn't you include Francis Ford Coppola's magnificently staged slaying of Sonny Corleone in *The Godfather*?

Ken Sheil
Moorestown, N.J.

Chatty Kathy

I've disagreed with you before, but I was incited to write in about your A– review of Kathy Griffin's new stand-up special (What to Watch). I was expecting a D–, as she's ceased to make jokes and merely recites the news.

David Crespo
Miami

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CHECK OUT OUR BRAND-NEW LOOK

EW.com
Five Fun Things Online

1. Tom Hanks Role Call
See how the multiple Academy Award winner went from *Bosom Buddies* to *Charlie Wilson's War* (above)—the hits, the misses, and the out-and-out mistakes.

2. Get Your PopWatch On!
Come for the witty blogging, stay for the Box Office Challenges (can *I Am Legend*—starring Will Smith, right—win?) and awkward pop culture confessions.

3. Meet the New American Gladiators
Just when you thought it was safe, those aggro reality warriors are back.

4. Viral Video Hall of Fame
From Pearl (Will Ferrell's foulmouthed, pint-size landlord) to the dramatic squirrel to that poor *Star Wars* trumpet girl, we vote some new online sensations into the pantheon.

5. Get Even!
Despite that old Klingon proverb about revenge being a dish best served cold, our Best Revenge Flicks gallery brings the heat, thanks to films like *Kill Bill* (left).

HANKS: FRANCOIS DUHAMEL/SMITH: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; AMERICAN GLADIATORS: CHRIS HASTON/KILL BILL: VOLUME 2: MIRAMAX/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

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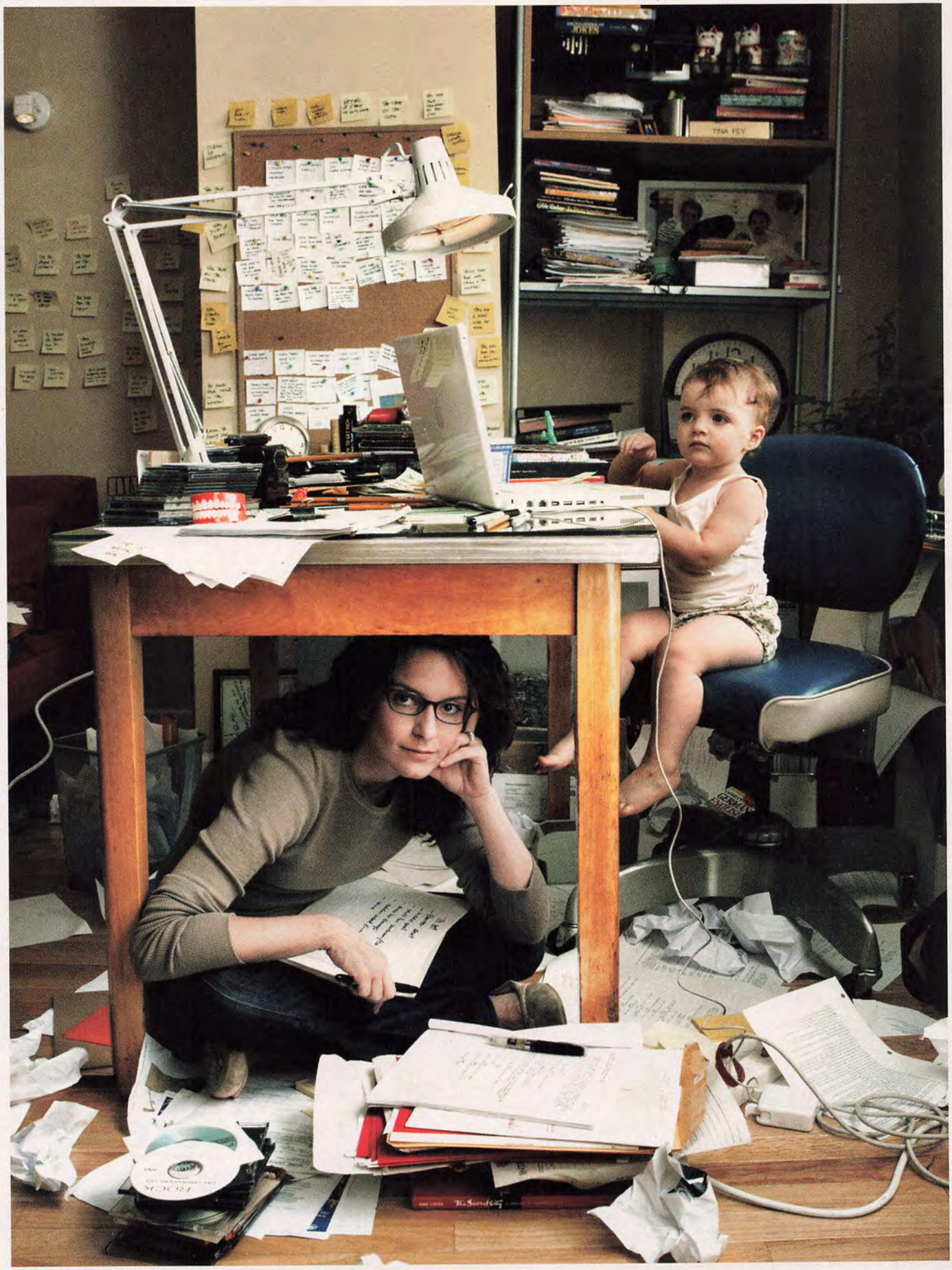

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while drinking a giant fountain soda. .....

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The Scene

7 Days in Entertainment

It's the end of the year and in Hollywood that means two things: An endless run of movie premieres and the beginning of the awards-show onslaught. This week delivered on both promises, with debuts for *P.S., I Love You*, *Atonement*, and *There Will Be Blood* (where some of the *Saturday Night Live* cast, on a strike-related hiatus, reunited) as well as the 7th Annual Breakthrough of the Year Awards.

OPEN WIDE
The Hilary Swank–Gerard Butler drama *P.S., I Love You* (out Dec. 21) starts somberly—the pair star as a couple torn apart by death—but you wouldn't know it from the atmosphere at the movie's L.A. premiere.

CASTING AROUND
We're missing them on TV, but they're not missing each other: *SNL* castmates Andy Samberg, Rachel Dratch, and Amy Poehler gather at the New York debut of the Daniel Day-Lewis saga *There Will Be Blood*.

WEB OBSESSION OF THE WEEK

You'll be mesmerized as you flip through 54 of Hitchcock's best films, each boiled down to nearly 2,000 striking, downloadable screen grabs. Believe us when we say that *Psycho*'s shower scene is even scarier in the photo essay format. *(www.hitchcockwiki.com)*

BUTLER AND SWANK: MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS/LANDOV; SAMBERG, DRATCH, AND POEHLER: OMAR REYES/LANDOV

CAREFUL, WE MIC HEAR YOU
Kevin Spacey and Uma Thurman prep for their gig as cohosts of the Nobel Peace Prize Concert in Oslo, Norway.

KILLER GLANCE
Keira Knightley turns heads, including her own, on the red carpet at the L.A. debut of *Atonement*, her new period romance that's currently courting Oscar (see p. 16).

"To be able to go from doing something as crazy and big as 'Pirates' to something beautiful and deep like 'Atonement,' you have to have someone looking out for you."
—KEIRA KNIGHTLEY
star of *Atonement*

'ALPHA' MALES
Alpha Dog costars Ben Foster (left) and Emile Hirsch reunite at the 7th Annual Breakthrough of the Year Awards on Dec. 9 in Hollywood, where they both were honored.

SPACEY AND THURMAN: SANDY YOUNG/WIREIMAGE.COM; KNIGHTLEY: SARA DE BOER/RETNA LTD.; FOSTER AND HIRSCH: TODD WILLIAMSON/WIREIMAGE.COM

THE SHAW REPORT
By Jessica Shaw

IN	FIVE MINUTES AGO	OUT
Joel and Ethan	*Luke and Owen*	*Peter and Bobby*
Green gowns	*Yellow gowns*	*Red gowns*
Calendula	*Arnica*	*Aloe*

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DiCaprio and Winslet: A-list, right ahead

ANNIVERSARY

'Titanic' at 10: Still Seaworthy

How James Cameron's epic love story stormed the box office, captivated moviegoers, and continues to transform Hollywood

You'd think there'd be a ticker-tape parade, a gala commemorative screening, or maybe a new anchor print in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre. But no, the 10th anniversary of James Cameron's *Titanic*—which was released on Dec. 19, 1997—is being marked by little more than a repackaged special-edition DVD.

It's a strangely low-key celebration, considering that in a 1998 cover story this very magazine said that *Titanic* would change the way Hollywood did just about everything. In many respects, it did: *Titanic* altered the mathematics of the movie industry, teaching the town to count past a billion. (Actually, way past: *Titanic* eventually took in $1.8 billion and remains the top-grossing movie of all time.)

A 1998 EW cover story said that 'Titanic' would change filmmaking forever. In many ways, it did.

Its infamously criticized $200 million budget, which had the whole business preparing for doomsday, would now be considered a bargain. The monster fortunes reportedly spent on *Spider-Man 3* ($270 million) or *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* ($300 million) barely make headlines anymore. "*Titanic* showed people in Hollywood that they could make a big bet," says an executive close to the production. "And it paid off in ways nobody ever thought."

It also taught them that it was okay to hedge those bets by splitting the risk. Before Cameron dreamed up waterlogged action sequences that required the construction of an entirely new studio in Mexico, single companies generally footed the bill for their own movies. But *Titanic* became such a drain that Fox teamed up with Paramount to cover some costs. The gambit paid off. *Titanic* spent an unprecedented 15 consecutive weeks atop the box office. In the years since, just as we predicted, many big-ticket films have been supported by up to three separate backers. The formula has yielded pricey prestige pictures like *Gladiator* and *A Beautiful Mind*, two Universal/DreamWorks co-productions—and Oscar winners—that might never have gotten made otherwise.

But *Titanic*'s ultimate legacy is what (and who) we see on screen. Analysts credited repeat viewing from 13-year-old girls for the film's success, and sure enough, look no further than

TITANIC: MERIE W. WALLACE

the success of *High School Musical*—a TV phenomenon that's now on its way to the big screen—for evidence that tweens are still the sweet spot for Hollywood marketing departments. By casting nascent stars Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet as his leads, Cameron let it be known that the doomed ocean liner was the real star of his show. Now—with the exception of the glitzy *Ocean's* franchise—it's harder and harder to find event movies that rely on star power alone. And if even thinking about the film makes you misty-eyed, you've probably cried at one of *Titanic*'s descendants, too. From *Moulin Rouge* to *Brokeback Mountain* and this month's *Atonement*, studios learned to fall in love with love again—only this time, it was the kind that hurt like hell. Recalls the executive, "Working on the script I always said, '[In] great love stories, they never end up together. You gotta give the people what they want.'" And did they ever. —*Christine Spines*

C U L8R!

French Twist: 'The Hills' Leaves Us Cliff-Hanging

Ooh la la, it's Lauren

Hopefully Lauren Conrad managed to learn the French equivalent of "Will you sign this production waiver?" before jetting off to Paris with pal Whitney on the Dec. 10 season finale of *The Hills*. Language issues aside, we were mostly left scratching our heads after the MTV reality phenomenon wrapped its third season. Are Brody and Lauren together? And what about Heidi and Spencer's broken engagement? Speaking of Heidi: That's one hell of a cushy gig she's got at Bolthouse! Apparently, our phony party planner is allowed to hightail it back to Colorado on a moment's notice. Or it's quite possible she's just facilitating the opening of Les Deux Boulder. Also—and yes, it's laughable to mention "reality" when discussing *The Hills*—Lauren's Parisian trip seemed like it would take her away from L.A. for only a few days, but the goodbyes appeared to be quite final. It's doubtful that the oddly Paleolithic-sounding Crillon Ball is a yearlong soiree, but we'll have to wait until next spring to find out just how long it lasted. That's when MTV plans to air eight "bonus episodes" as a coda to season 3. And we thought *The Sopranos* left us in the dark. —*Tim Stack*

THE BULLSEYE

They shoot, we score: rating the biggest hits and misses in pop culture this week

Jennifer Love Hewitt fatigue
James McAvoy in *Atonement*: For those who weren't ever quite on board the Ryan Gosling Express
Spice Girls fatigue (again)
Led Zeppelin: The Golden Years
The JC Penney-sponsored recaps midway through ***Friday Night Lights***. Thanks, but we're not that dumb.
Sex and the City movie teaser: Great clothes, but could you give us a little plot? Just an iota?
The **strike** that stole Christmas

BOX OFFICE

A Tarnished Opening for 'The Golden Compass'

It was supposed to be New Line's next great franchise—a lavish spectacle on par with the studio's *Lord of the Rings* series. But last weekend *The Golden Compass*, an adaptation of the first book in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, opened to a wan $25.8 million. And like that, it went from potentially Middle-earth-shattering to potentially embarrassing.

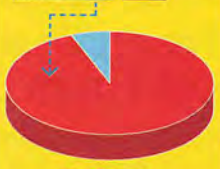
How did *Compass* wind up so far off course? Lack of a built-in audience, for one thing. Unlike 2005's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (which made $292 million) and the Tolkien and J.K. Rowling canons, *Compass* doesn't have the kind of classic-novel cachet in the U.S. that can attract huge crowds. It also had the misfortune of following a rash of poorly received fantasy films that were released in the post–*LOTR*/Harry Potter frenzy.

EW.COM POLL

HOST WANTED?

Oprah Winfrey hit the road to campaign for Barack Obama

Do celebrity endorsements affect how you vote?



94% No
6% Yes

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This.

LOVE HEWITT: JEFFREY MAYER/WIREIMAGE; EMMA "BABY SPICE" BUNTON: RICHARD LAM/AP PHOTO; *HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS*: EVERETT COLLECTION; *SEX AND THE CITY: THE MOVIE*: BOBBY BANK/WIREIMAGE.COM; *FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS*: VAN REDIN; ROBERT PLANT: KEVIN WESTENBERG/EXCLUSIVE BY GETTY IMAGES; *ATONEMENT*: ALEX BAILEY; WINFREY: JEMAL COUNTESS/WIREIMAGE

In the last year alone, *Eragon*, *The Seeker: The Dark Is Rising*, and *Stardust* flopped, and upcoming flicks such as *Inkheart* and *The Spiderwick Chronicles* could suffer too. Middling reviews added to *Compass*' woes, as did its complicated plot: Accompanied by a shape-shifting "daemon" who is the manifestation of her soul, a girl seeks her kidnapped friend and an uncle who is obsessed with cosmic dust. (Warning: Rereading that sentence may make your head explode.) And New Line probably hurt itself by never directly addressing *Compass*' religious controversy, thereby appeasing neither Pullman's fans nor the groups that targeted the film for a boycott.

As for what *Compass*' debut means for plans to adapt other *Materials* books, New Line says "no official decisions have been made." That may be true, but you don't need an alethiometer to tell you it's not looking good. The risk may simply be too great, especially since the studio is finishing a

Wrong way, *Golden* girl

tough year in which *Hairspray* and *Rush Hour 3* were the lone hits in a pool of duds (*Love in the Time of Cholera*, *Rendition*, *Shoot 'Em Up*). Overseas, *Compass* grossed $55 million in its first four days, but that promising number won't help New Line recoup its investment, since it had previously sold the foreign distribution rights.

The studio's co-CEOs Michael Lynne and Robert Shaye, whose contracts are up for renewal next year, could use another surefire hit—something along the lines of, say, a return to Middle-earth. Don't be surprised, then, if 2008 turns out to be the year New Line finally resolves its legal battle with Peter Jackson over *The Hobbit*. —*Missy Schwartz*

WE BELIEVE THE CHILDREN ARE OUR FUTURE

Teach Them Well and Let Them Lead the Way

Kid Nation didn't turn out to be the end of the world...but it wasn't the beginning of a revolution, either. After all the headlines—allegations of child abuse, salacious stories of bleach drinking, New Mexico's labor investigation, now dropped—viewers got 13 weeks of very smart

Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word

Genie Francis apologized to fans last week for quitting 'General Hospital'—in 1982. Here are some apologies we'll be expecting, oh, around 2032. —Christine Fenno

Sarah Wayne Callies

Should Ask for Forgiveness For leaving *Prison Break* abruptly and prompting writers to decapitate her character. **Act of Contrition** Nothing short of a cryogenic head reattachment will earn a pardon.

Mandy Patinkin

Should Ask for Forgiveness For departing *Criminal Minds* without warning last July. **Act of Contrition** One explanation to curious fans and three "Over the Rainbow"s should do.

Rosie O'Donnell

Should Ask for Forgiveness For bolting from *The View* and leaving us with a snoozefest. **Act of Contrition** Her nervy work on *Nip/Tuck* almost evens the score, but how about reviewing The Donald's new *Celebrity Apprentice* for EW?

OSCAR BUZZ-O-METER

With critics' groups chiming in, the race just got a lot more interesting. Here's how five contenders are faring. —*Dave Karger*

No Country for Old Men The Coen brothers' drama is picking up steam with Best Picture wins from four groups, including the National Board of Review and the New York critics.

American Gangster Ridley Scott's crime saga did eke out a spot on the Broadcast Film Critics' top 10 list. But it was otherwise MIA from the first round of prizes.

Atonement The period piece has earned mostly strong reviews and promising box office. But a few high-profile critical slams (like one from *The New York Times*) left a big sting.

Amy Ryan *Gone Baby Gone*'s fierce baby-mama is the season's biggest winner so far, racking up six of the first seven Best Supporting Actress honors.

Juno The quirky pregnancy comedy's terrific reviews led to one of the highest opening-weekend per-theater averages this year. Its first trimester is going swimmingly.

THE GOLDEN COMPASS: LAURIE SPARHAM; CALLIES: GRAYSON ALEXANDER/RETNA; O'DONNELL: RD/ECKSTEIN/RETNA DIGITAL; PATINKIN: DONALD BOWERS/GETTY IMAGES FOR TFF; NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN: RICHARD FOREMAN; AMERICAN GANGSTER: DAVID LEE; ATONEMENT: ALEX BAILEY; RYAN: CLAIRE FOLGER; JUNO: DIANE GREGORY

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children living in a pediatrician-controlled environment and not washing the dishes often enough. Hardly the stuff of legend.

Still, I'm not ready to declare *Kid Nation* a failure. Nor do I think the show's so-so ratings (an average of 7.4 million viewers, several in the unattractive 2–11 demo) are a reflection of its entertainment value. Leaders like the impossibly perfect Laurel gave me hope, but it was the weirdos who kept me watching: Shakespeare-quoting savant Jared. One-toothed chart-maker Alex. Caustic "sheriff" Sophia, whose many sociological experiments never got dull. (Will kids stick their hands in goop for money? Yes!)

Exec producer Tom Forman is already prepping *Kid Nation* 2, pending CBS' approval. (No word on where he'll film, though some reports indicate the kids may want to have a passport handy.) Asked which aspect of season 1 he's most proud of, Forman cites the cast's willingness to atone for crappy behavior: "There are moments on *Kid Nation* that will never exist on *Survivor*." True—but the rare glimpses of kids being their oddball selves often gave the show its most compelling moments. Why not flood season 2 with more of that footage? On second thought, why not just hire Sophia to run the whole damn production? —*Whitney Pastorek*

TREND ALERT

Here's to 2007—The Pest Year of Our Lives

Poison can't kill them, but critics might

The trailer for Dec. 14's *Alvin and the Chipmunks* might make you cringe, what with that highly unnecessary shot of critter scat. But it's merely the capper to the Year of the Vermin. *Ratatouille* star Remy bested *Top Chef* season 2's Marcel Vigneron for the title of Most Talented Rat in the Kitchen. A possum scored its own subplot on *Desperate Housewives*. Splinter was revived for the tragically CGI'ed *TMNT*. And *Enchanted*'s housecleaning army of rats, pigeons, and cockroaches was a fizzy high point. We imagine it's only a matter of time before YouTube's waterskiing squirrel lands a three-picture deal. —*Kate Ward*

HITLIST

By Scott Brown

1 **Lifelong bachelor Scott Baio films his wedding for reality show** *Look at what the writers' strike has driven him to.*

2 **Friendship between Owen Wilson, Woody Harrelson popularizes the word "bromance"** *However, my phrase "Bromeo and Bruliet" remains unpopular outside this column.*

3 **A crew member for Liza Minnelli is held for allegedly hitting a photographer** *You think Minnelli's crew is bad? Bette Midler's thugs force-fed me a 'For the Boys' soundtrack.*

4 **PETA slimes "Hairy Kate" and "Trashley" Olsen for designing with fur** *Meanwhile, People for Punctiliousness attacked them as "Very Late" and "Rashly."*

5 **Jack Nicholson says men have more in common with dogs** *"For instance," he went on, "many people don't know that we perspire by panting."*

6 **Britney Spears allegedly shoplifts a cigarette lighter at a gas station** *I can't believe it. She's...smoking??!*

7 **Kevin Bacon campaigns for John Edwards** *Tally it up: That's at least six famous people for John Edwards.*

8 **Hilary Swank says she once choked on vitamins** *Well, the vitamins probably choked on 'The Reaping,' so I'd say they're even.*

9 **Irish magazine apologizes to Tiger Woods' wife for fake nude photos** *"We promise to put your head on a better body next time," said the editor. "This old 'Playgirl' spread of the Edge was all we had lying around."*

10 **Ellen DeGeneres launches a plan to refurbish animal shelters** *She's qualified: After the last few weeks, she knows a little something about the doghouse.*

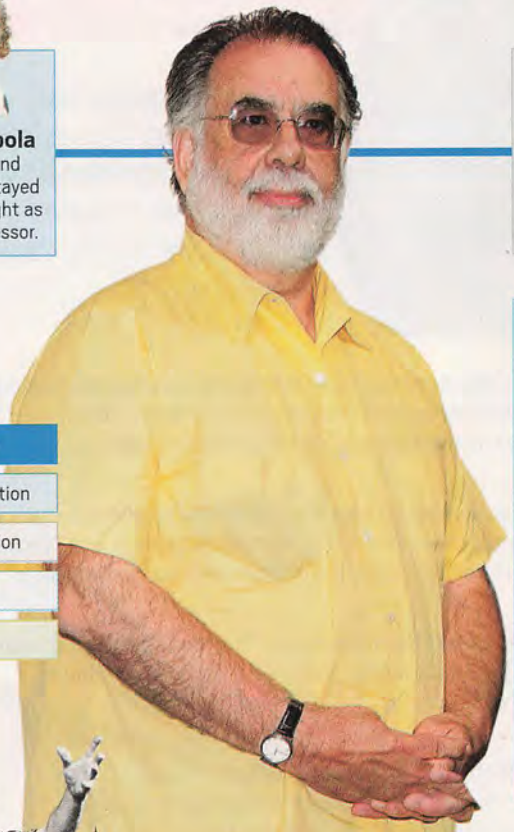
>EW.COM For all the latest headlines, pictures, and ridiculous Hollywood miscellany, visit popwatch.ew.com

ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: 20TH CENTURY FOX; BAIO: REBECCA SAPP/WIREIMAGE.COM; BACON: VALERIE MACON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

COPPOLA FAMILY FLOW

With Francis Ford Coppola's 'Youth Without Youth' and Nicolas Cage's 'National Treasure: Book of Secrets' both hitting theaters this month, EW decided to chart the twisted—and surprisingly far-reaching—family tree of one of Hollywood's most celebrated clans. **BY ADAM MARKOVITZ**

August Coppola
Francis' bro (and Nic's dad) has stayed out of the spotlight as a literature professor.



Key

- Progenitor
- Second generation
- Third generation
- Spouse
- Wes

Nicolas Cage (né Coppola)
The family's bona fide movie star changed his name to stay off the brood's coattails, but he still couldn't avoid the blood ties: Cage had a small part in Francis Ford's *Rumble Fish* (1983) and *The Cotton Club* (1984), and scored his second Oscar nomination for playing twins in *Adaptation*, directed by one-time cousin-in-law Spike. But don't be fooled by Alicia Coppola in the *Treasure* sequel—she's not part of "the family."

Patricia Arquette
(divorced 2001) During their six-year union, the *Medium* star linked the Coppolas to another Hollywood power family: the Arquettes (who included Meriwether Lewis?!).

Lisa Marie Presley
(divorced 2004) Cage, an avowed Elvis fan, was hubby No. 3 for Lisa Marie.

Alice Kim
Married at 20, her son with Cage is named Kal-El (a.k.a. Superman's birth name).

Michael Jackson
(divorced 1996) While known more for his music than his forays into film, MJ's *Captain EO* movie (shown at Disney theme parks in the '80s and '90s) was directed by Francis Ford, his future ex-wife's uncle-in-law.

Carmine Coppola
(d. 1991) The clan's patriarch won an Oscar for scoring *The Godfather Part II*.

Francis Ford Coppola
He met his wife, Eleanor, on the set of his first major film: the Roger Corman horror pic *Dementia 13*. His company American Zoetrope produces projects by kids Sofia and Roman, among others.

Sofia Coppola
Once scorned for her acting in *The Godfather Part III*, Sofia became the first American woman to get an Oscar nod for Best Director (for *Lost in Translation*).

Spike Jonze
(divorced 2003) The *Being John Malkovich* director is rumored to have inspired the self-absorbed husband (played by Giovanni Ribisi) in *Translation*.

Roman Coppola
For *CQ*, his 2002 feature debut, the award-winning music-video director drew from childhood memories of his father's movie sets.

Wes Anderson
Okay, so he may not be family, but given his list of Coppola co-credits, including, most recently, *The Darjeeling Limited*, he may as well be!

Talia Shire (née Coppola)
After nabbing Oscar nods for her roles in *Rocky* and *The Godfather Part II*, Carmine's only daughter married producer Jack Schwartzman (*Being There*).

Jason Schwartzman
Since his breakout turn in *Rushmore* (cousin Sofia recommended him for the part), Schwartzman has kept it in the family with roles in Roman's *CQ* and Sofia's *Marie Antoinette*.

Robert Schwartzman
Jason's little bro fronts rock group Rooney and dabbles in acting: He popped up in *The Princess Diaries* and Sofia's debut, *The Virgin Suicides*.

FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA: DANIELE VENTURELLI/WIREIMAGE; CAGE: JUN SATO/WIREIMAGE; ARQUETTE: JEAN-PAUL AUSSENARD/WIREIMAGE; PRESLEY: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; KIM: TIM WHITBY/WIREIMAGE; JACKSON: ERIC THAYER/POLARIS; SOFIA COPPOLA: JAMIE MCCARTHY/WIREIMAGE; JONZE: GREGG DEGUIRE/WIREIMAGE; ROMAN COPPOLA: JON FURNISS/WIREIMAGE; ANDERSON: TODD WILLIAMSON/WIREIMAGE; JASON SCHWARTZMAN: ERIC CHARBONNEAU/WIREIMAGE; ROBERT SCHWARTZMAN: ERIC CHARBONNEAU/WIREIMAGE; AUGUST COPPOLA: JIM SMEAL/WIREIMAGE; CARMINE COPPOLA: TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES; SHIRE: EVERETT COLLECTION

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Kiss me, Kate: *Private Practice*'s Walsh has a new costar

Television By Lynette Rice and Jessica Shaw

'PRIVATE' PART

+ Talk about coitus interruptus: **David Sutcliffe** (*Gilmore Girls*) was set to become **Kate Walsh**'s new love interest on *Private Practice* until the ongoing writers' strike postponed any chance for beachside nookie (the duo was last seen exchanging glances on Dec. 5). Sutcliffe says he'll be back for at least four more episodes as Officer Kevin Nelson, though he has no idea how the courtship will play out: "We'll have some kind of date and things will heat up, but...I don't know if we're getting married or I'm getting killed. That's part of the fun with it."

+ Last winter, viewers tuned in to Bravo's *Top Design* expecting a *Project Runway*- and *Top Chef*-esque (read: classy) reality show about home decorating. Instead, they got an hour that was about as thrilling as staring at a beige wall. So if news that the series will be back next year surprises you, take heart: Bravo has hired Magical Elves, the production company behind *Runway* and *Chef*, to give *Design* a head-to-toe makeover. "We want the show to be everything it can be," says Bravo programming exec Andy Cohen. "It was a show people rooted for—and has a ton of potential." As such, Elves' Dan Cutforth and Jane Lipsitz say they plan to feature "more accessible design" in season 2. They're about to start contestant casting but have yet to decide if underutilized host **Todd Oldham** and judges Jonathan Adler, Margaret Russell, and Kelly Wearstler will return. (Says Cutforth, "I'm sure there will be some changes.") How nervous are they about the new challenge? "Ultimately, it's a simple format," says Cutforth. "It's not like the wheel has to be reinvented." But it could certainly use a new coat of paint.

Music By Shirley Halperin

Action Jackson: Randy's Big Plans

+ Multitasking producer Randy Jackson is prepping the release of a compilation album in March 2008. *Randy Jackson's Music Club Vol. 1* promises "a lot of crazy guest stars," the *American Idol* judge tells us. "It's kind of a Quincy Jones record with all sorts—country, pop, hip-hop, R&B, and jazz songs. Different people are singing on every song. There's a bunch of artists." Jackson spoke to us from the set of his new MTV show *America's Best Dance Crew*, a live-performance competition slated to air early next year. But don't worry—he's not giving up his *Idol* gig. In fact, he's more pumped than ever about season 7. "The under-21 crowd is blowing me away. We could have our most original top 12 ever. I was pleasantly surprised."

Movies By Nicole Sperling

'A-TEAM' PLAYER

+ We love it when a plan comes together: According to sources, **John Singleton** will bring *The A-Team* to the big screen. The director is in negotiations to helm Twentieth Century Fox's adaptation of NBC's '80s hit, which is being morphed into an action-packed modern-day comedy based on that crazy group of ex–U.S. Army Special Forces who work as "soldiers of fortune." No casting has been announced, which means Mr. T's iconic B.A. Baracas role is up for grabs. Let's just hope the phrase "I pity the fool" gets retired. The gold chains and mohawk, however, must stay.

WALSH: JILL JOHNSON/JPISTUDIOS.COM; JACKSON: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE.COM; SINGLETON: JAMIE MCCARTHY/WIREIMAGE

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Spotlight

Mary J. Blige

In the wake of her 'Breakthrough' success, the reigning queen of R&B tries to please her many followers—but, most of all, herself. **BY SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON**

It's been 10 full months, but Mary J. Blige can't stop replaying last February in her mind. First, the 36-year-old singer swept up three Grammys for her 2005 album, *The Breakthrough*. Then, two weeks later, she kept the celebration going by swinging through some of L.A.'s most exclusive post-Oscar parties. Sitting today in a spacious New York City hotel suite, Blige breaks into a breathless roll call of the Hollywood royals she rubbed elbows with on Oscar night. "I found myself hanging out with Oprah. It was like, 'I cannot believe that she would want to hang out with me.' For me, I'm always the underdog. It was mind-blowing. Nicole Kidman was like, 'Hi, Mary J.!' Wow. And then here comes Meryl Streep, and I'm like, 'I love your work! I don't know if you really know who I am.'" Blige beams. "She was like, 'I know *exactly* who you are.'"

They're far from the only ones who were taking new notice of Blige. True to its title, *The Breakthrough* marked the moment that this respected R&B belter became a bona fide mainstream icon—the kind of vocalist who could groove alongside Jay-Z on one track, then turn around and emote her heart out with the members of U2 on a remake of their modern-rock classic "One."

Blige has experienced the power of music to transform lives: It helped her survive a rough childhood and, later, battles with substance abuse.

But the album's success—it quickly went triple platinum—also created a tricky balancing act for Blige this spring, when she set out to record her follow-up, *Growing Pains* (out Dec. 18). She wanted to hold on to her newfound wider audience—the people she calls "the Bono listeners"—but she also worried about straying too far from her urban roots. "I'm not going to chase what [mainstream fans] like." She leans forward and slips into the third person, as she often does when emphasizing a point. "They like me. So I'm going to give them Mary. And that's that."

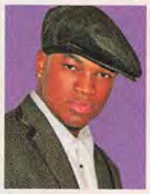
In practice, what she's giving them with her eighth studio effort is somewhere in between—a little bit glossy pop, a little bit no-nonsense R&B. To get there, this long-term career artist reached out to a cast of mostly young collaborators with recent radio hits under their belts. Like Beyoncé's "Irreplaceable"? You'll love the two lush tunes contributed by that smash's songwriter, Ne-Yo, and producers Stargate. The ghost of Rihanna's "Umbrella" is similarly present in the four cuts from producer Christopher "Tricky" Stewart and songwriter Terius "The-Dream" Nash. (That team actually offered "Umbrella" to Blige back in overscheduled February, before Rihanna's label won it in a bidding war.) But don't accuse Blige of trend-hopping. "Certain sounds on the radio, I'm like, 'Nah. Not doing that.' When you just blatantly jump on something, it doesn't work for me. It might work for a Mariah. It might work for even a Beyoncé. But Mary J. Blige is looked at as some sort of organic thing."

Blige is most animated when discussing *Pains*' lyrics: "It's all about the empowering of women," she says. "I'm trying to make them comfortable and strong." When it comes to the power of music to transform lives, Blige speaks from experience: She credits tunes like Soul II Soul's 1989 "Keep on Movin'" and Sounds of Blackness' 1991 "Optimistic" with helping her survive a rough childhood and, later, prolonged battles with substance abuse—thankfully, far in her past.

Even as her music continues to evolve, Blige hasn't forgotten her troubled history. It's what makes her wince whenever she sees the media hounding artists like Amy Winehouse. "They're human beings, and they're young, in a business that doesn't give a hoot about you. It's just sad. I hate to see any of these females go through it. I was young, and I did dumb stuff—I was doing worse than that." Blige's life still comes with its share of complications, but she's staying positive: "It takes so much to get to a certain point in your life. It was painful. But it was pain for a great cause. And that's to make Mary J. Blige better." ■

Mary's Dream Team

If she could sign anyone to her label, Matriarch Records, she'd pick...



Ne-Yo

"The best love-story songwriter in this generation. And he's smart. You don't find that in the music business!"

Rihanna

"When you look at her, you can see her heart, her confidence, her grace—and her ability to sing *and* model."

Keyshia Cole

"She has a story to tell [e.g., Cole's drug-addicted mom giving her up for adoption]. The kids of her age group need her."

Chris Brown

"He has this thing that New Edition had—this youthful kid on the block that can *dance*. And he's a handsome little dude!"

Style

DRESSING SWANK-Y

We'll leave matters of plot to the critics, but on the fashion front, P.S. I Love You, out next week, is tops. Eager to get Hilary Swank's look? While the film jokes that it all came from eBay (a seemingly magical land where even struggling New Yorkers can afford Chanel), you can score a similar style using our handy little shopping guide. **BY MEETA AGRAWAL**

The best part of *P.S.* is the parade of coats, trenches, and toppers. For modern girl-about-town, try this **Loeffler Randall cape**. *($425; at Nordstrom)*

"One of the things we really wanted to do was make Hilary look like she's never looked before."
WENDY FINERMAN
P.S. producer, on Swank's wardrobe

An obi-style patent-leather belt helps Swank's character hold it all together. Go faux with this **sash from Forever 21**. *($8; forever21.com)*

To draw inspiration for the character's look, the costume designers turned to that style-icon-for-all, Audrey Hepburn. So naturally only the most elegant handbag would do. Hers is vintage, but **Rebecca Minkoff's Morning After Mini** is an instant classic. *($550; Bloomingdale's)*

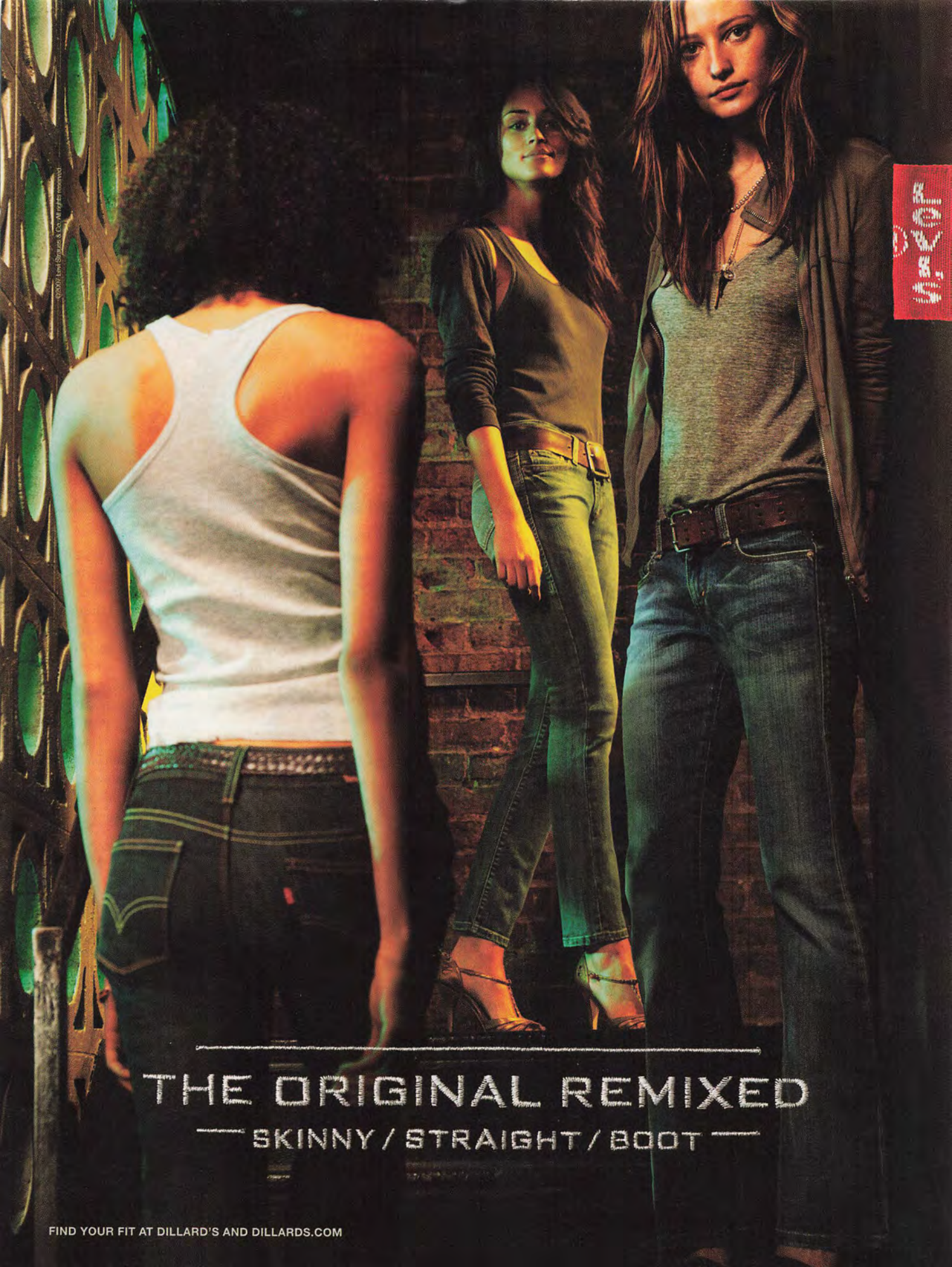
What Swank's character knows: trendy on the shoes, classic on the wristwear. Keep time timelessly with a **nappa-strapped watch by Coach**. *($228; coach.com)*

"I didn't have to put on 15 pounds of muscle or pass as a boy," says Swank, explaining the joys of making *P.S.* "I get to wear a lot of pretty clothes and shoes, which I enjoy doing in real life." You too can show your demure side with the **Viola black-and-ivory striped skirt**. *($98; anthropologie.com)*

P.P.S. But No Shoes for You! Like any good New Yorker, Swank's character is a shoe obsessive. These particular kicks, a departure from her usual chic style, form a key plot point. But don't go looking for them in stores—shoe artist **Llorraine Neithardt** crafted them especially for close friend and *P.S.* director Richard LaGravenese.

Additional reporting by Carrie Bell

(P. 22-23) BLIGE: MR PHOTO/CORBIS OUTLINE; NE-YO: ADMEDIA/SIPA; RIHANNA: CHRIS ASHFORD/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA; COLE: PETER KRAMER/AP/WIDE WORLD; BROWN: LISA ROSE/AP/WIDE WORLD; *P.S. I LOVE YOU*: PHIL CARUSO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MARRIED

Happy Days are here for **Scott Baio**: The *Scott Baio Is 45...and Single* star, who's actually 46, said "I do" to Renée Sloan, 34, on Dec. 8 in L.A.... Backstreet Boy **Howie Dorough**, 34, wed Leigh Boniello, 33, on Dec. 8 in Orlando.

AILING

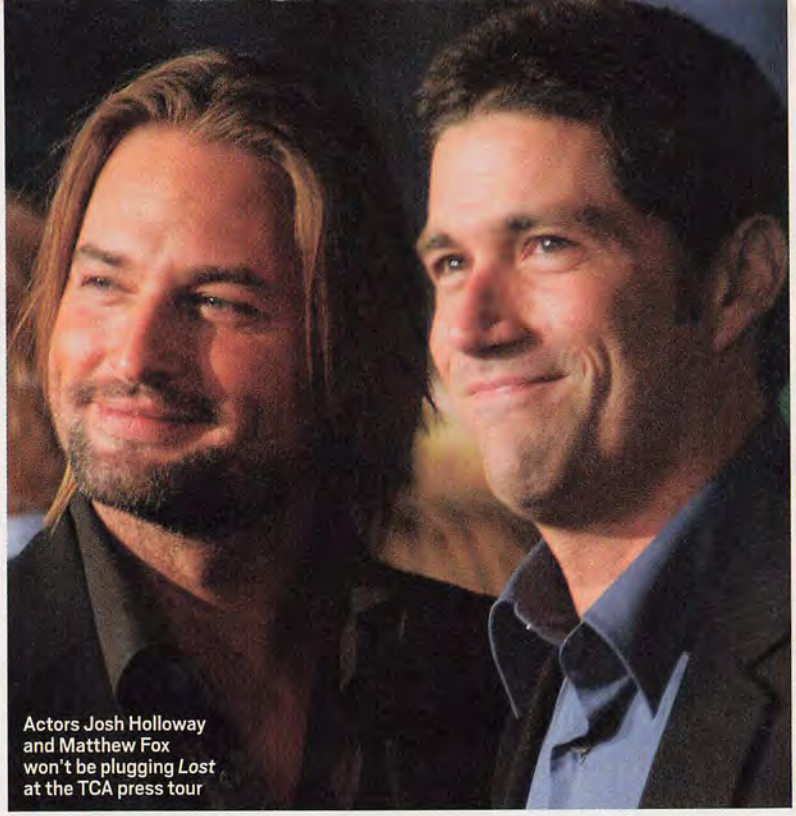
Alex Trebek, 67, suffered a minor heart attack on Dec. 10. The *Jeopardy!* host is expected to return to work as scheduled in January.... Rapper **Bow Wow** (né Shad Moss), 20, was hospitalized for exhaustion and an infection of the appendix after a Dec. 6 show in Cincinnati. He was released on Dec. 8.

CANCELED

On Dec. 10 in L.A., the Television Critics Association called off its annual January press tour, where programmers, including the five broadcast networks, present their lineups to journalists. The move comes as negotiations between studios and the Writers Guild have stalled. In a letter to its members, TCA president Dave Walker said that networks—citing budget cutbacks and talent unavailability—had not committed to the event. In fact, NBC had pulled out in November.

ROBBED

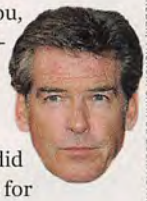
On Dec. 8, police discovered a break-in at the L.A. home of **Charlize Theron** (*In the Valley of Elah*), 32. The actress was out of town.



Actors Josh Holloway and Matthew Fox won't be plugging *Lost* at the TCA press tour

COURTS

On Dec. 5, **Kiefer Sutherland**, 40, reported to an L.A. county jail, where he'll serve 48 days for a DUI conviction, his second in three years. Once released, the *24* star must attend an 18-month alcohol-education class, followed by a five-year probationary period.... **Ray Liotta** (*GoodFellas*), 53, pleaded no contest to reckless driving on Dec. 6 in L.A. Liotta says he was suffering from a prescription-drug interaction when he hit two unoccupied parked cars in February. He received three years' probation and 12 hours of alcohol education.... On Dec. 7 in L.A., **Vivica A. Fox** (*Curb Your Enthusiasm*), 43, pleaded no contest to DUI for a March arrest. She took a deal that includes alcohol education and three years of probation.... An L.A. judge issued an arrest warrant for **Daniel Baldwin**, 47, on Dec. 7. The actor, picked up in 2006 on cocaine charges, was to appear in court to discuss his drug rehabilitation. His lawyer blamed the incident on "miscommunication."... On Dec. 7 in L.A., **Pierce Brosnan**, 54, was sued for unspecified damages by a photographer who claims he was assaulted by the ex-Bond on Oct. 26 in Malibu, Calif. (No criminal charges were filed against Brosnan.) His reps did not return calls for comment.



DEATHS

CBS exec **Roger King**, 63, who took *The Oprah Winfrey Show* national with his TV syndicate King World, of a stroke, Dec. 8, in Boca Raton, Fla.... Actor **Joe Brooks** (*F Troop*), 83, of natural causes, Dec. 5, in Woodland Hills, Calif. *—Adam Markovitz, with additional reporting by Stewart Allen*

LEGACY

Karlheinz Stockhausen

(1928–2007) The avant-garde composer and electronic-music pioneer died on Dec. 5 in Kürten, Germany. Among those influenced by his droning synthesizers and random sounds: Miles Davis, Sonic Youth, Björk, and even the Beatles, who featured his image on the cover of 1967's *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. *—Simon Vozick-Levinson*

HOLLOWAY AND FOX: ALBERT L. ORTEGA/WIREIMAGE; STOCKHAUSEN: TIM GRAHAM/EVENING STANDARD/GETTY IMAGES; TREBEK, THERON: SARA DE BOER/RETNA; SUTHERLAND: PHOTOPRO/LANDOV; BROSNAN: R. STONEHOUSE/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA

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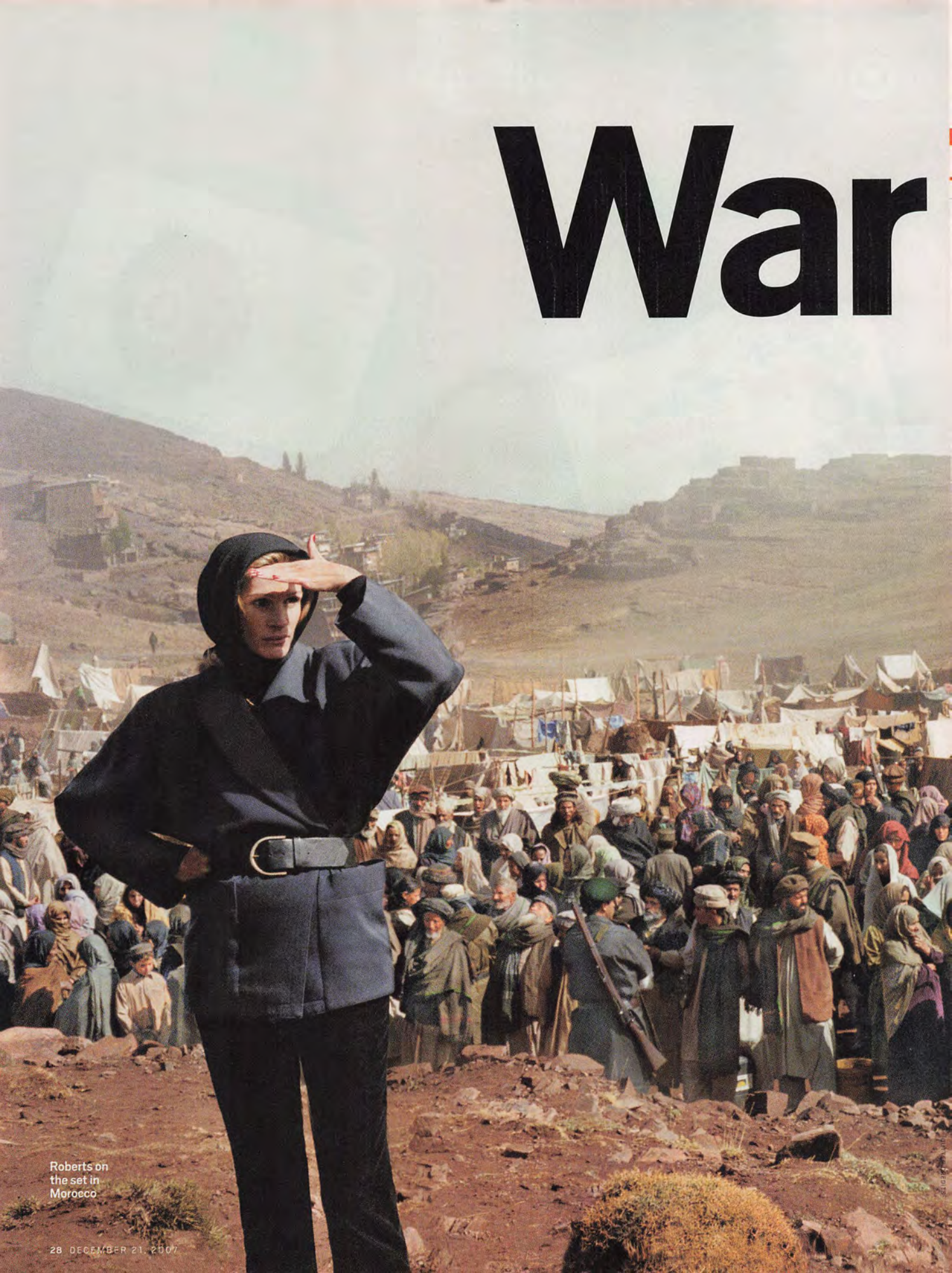
War



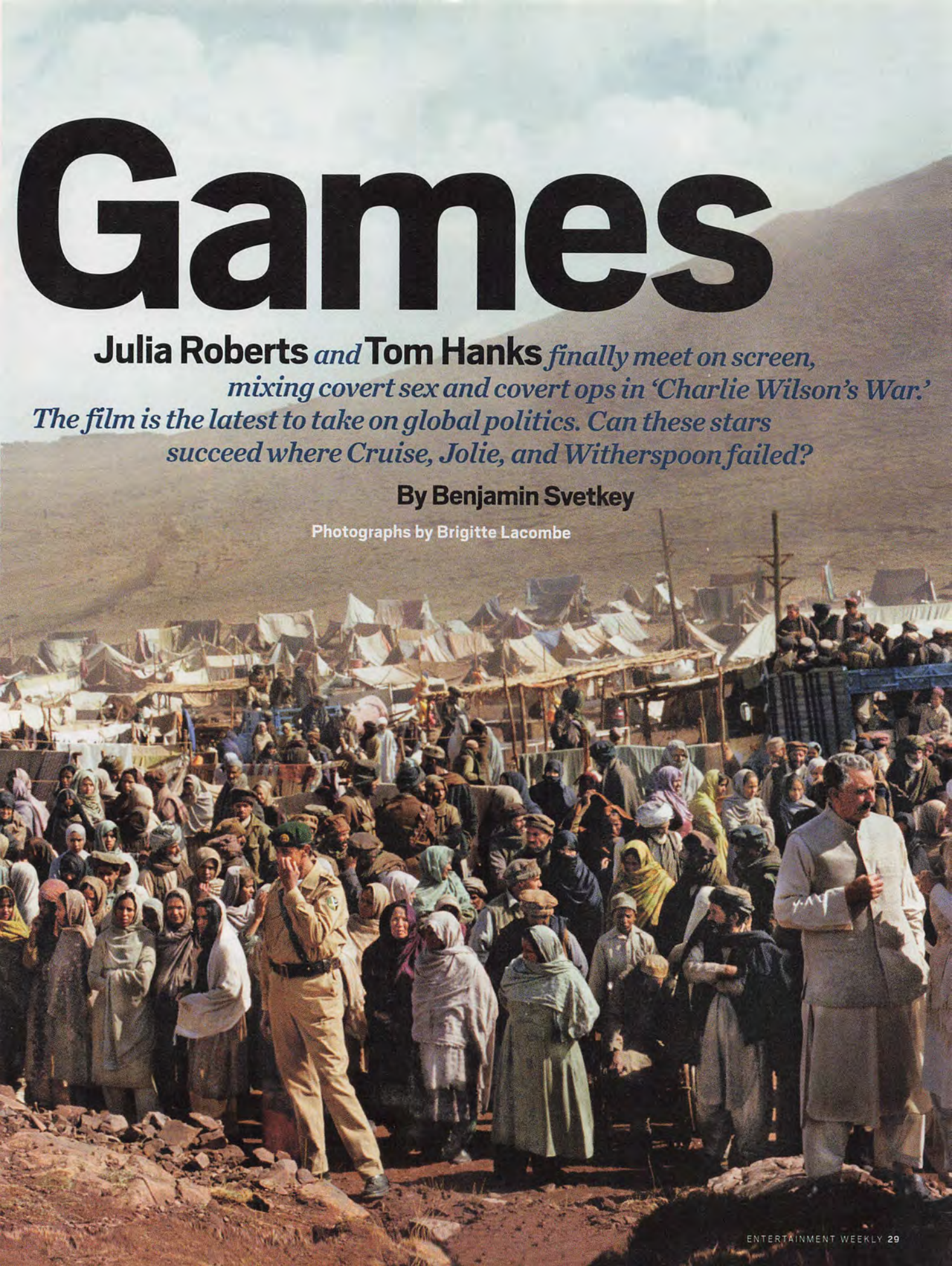
Roberts on the set in Morocco

Games

Julia Roberts *and* **Tom Hanks** *finally meet on screen, mixing covert sex and covert ops in 'Charlie Wilson's War.' The film is the latest to take on global politics. Can these stars succeed where Cruise, Jolie, and Witherspoon failed?*

By Benjamin Svetkey

Photographs by Brigitte Lacombe



From left: Nancy Linehan Charles, Nichols, Roberts, Hanks, and Hoffman

As the door swings open to Julia Roberts' suite at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, you half expect to find her in a bubble bath howling Prince tunes. Or at least splayed out on the carpet nibbling strawberries with champagne. This is, after all, the very spot where she charged Richard Gere $300 a night for the pleasure of her company in *Pretty Woman*, the movie that, 17 years ago, began her reign as the most sought-after starlet of the 1990s. But one look at the actress perched regally on the sofa with a fluffy scarf wrapped around her neck—"I've got a cold," she explains—and it's clear she'll be doing the junket scene from *Notting Hill* instead.

"I don't know why they picked this hotel," Roberts says with a shrug as a flock of publicists with clipboards and BlackBerries flutter out of the room. "I've never done interviews here before. I never come here at all. I feel stupid. I can hear the *Pretty Woman* soundtrack in my head."

The reason she's here on this overcast November afternoon is to do publicity for *Charlie Wilson's War*, the first film in which she shares screen time with that other matinee mainstay of the 1990s, Tom Hanks. But unlike the frothy love stories these two were whipping up a decade ago, nobody in this movie finds a soul mate at the Empire State Building or tries to wreck a best friend's wedding—although at one point they do sort of "meet cute" at a refugee camp in Pakistan. Based on the late *60 Minutes* producer George Crile's best-selling 2003 book, it's

the true tale of a real-life, little-known Texas congressman (Hanks) who joins forces with a stubborn, right-wing blue blood (Roberts) and a temperamental CIA agent (Philip Seymour Hoffman) to set in motion the largest covert operation of the Cold War: aiding the mujahideen during the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. "I'd never heard of Charlie Wilson before I read it," admits director Mike Nichols. "But it's a story about how one guy changed the world. And what better time to hear that message than when we're all feeling totally passive and helpless?" Then again, the story can't help but remind us of how those Afghan rebels whom Charlie Wilson was secretly helping would one day grow up to become al-Qaeda.

Yes, *Charlie Wilson's War* is Hollywood's latest attempt to get moviegoers interested in global politics. (See review on page 56.) No matter how you

"People aren't as interested in making a cool movie," Roberts says of stardom. "Now it's about being shiny and fabulous."

spin it—Roberts, for one, likes to look at it as "a three-part character piece"—it deals with American meddling in the Middle East and the blowback that inevitably follows. The body count for this particular genre has been high in the past few years: *Syriana*, *Babel*, *A Mighty Heart*, *Rendition*, *In the Valley of Elah*, *The Kingdom*, *Lions for Lambs* (see sidebar on page 37). *Charlie Wilson's War* has some strategic advantages over the others: a snarky script by Aaron Sorkin that zips by with the snappy pacing of a *West Wing* episode and a hilarious, bellicose turn by Hoffman as Gust Avrakotos, the surliest spy in the CIA. Still, given box office trends, it's a brave band of moviemakers that marches into theaters with a picture about foreign policy these days.

"I haven't seen a lot of those other movies—are they any good?" Roberts asks, flashing that famous blinding grin in her suite at the old Reg Bev Wilsh. "I guess on some level ours would line up with the others in the Dewey decimal system of movies," she acknowledges. "But when I hear people call this a 'war' movie, I don't know what they're talking about. It's really just a movie about three people. And the tone of it is so original. It goes from lofty to light to funny to interesting. It's like watching Cirque du Soleil."

Roberts and Nichols

Of course, the biggest guns in *Charlie Wilson's War* are Tom and Julia themselves. If the combined force of these two cinematic howitzers can't get the audience interested in current events, nobody can. That's the tactic, anyway, that Universal will be betting on when it opens the film on Dec. 21. But as superpowers from Angelina Jolie to Reese Witherspoon have been learning lately, cinematic warfare is a lot less predictable today—and even more dangerous—than it was back in the '90s.

There is, as it happens, a bubble bath scene in *Charlie Wilson's War*. But it's Hanks in the tub, not Roberts, and there is no singing of Prince songs. At the moment, Hanks is sitting at a desk at an editing suite in Santa Monica, tweaking a project he's producing about another underappreciated politician: John Adams (Paul Giamatti will star as the second U.S. president in a cable miniseries

Hanks as Charlie Wilson

"It's chaos out there now," Hanks says. "Nobody knows what's going to be a hit or what's going to be irrelevant."

beginning this March). Hanks' affection for American history is well known to anyone with an HBO subscription—after *John Adams*, he'll be launching *The Pacific*, a World War II miniseries that will bookend his 2001 epic, *Band of Brothers*. But except for a turn as astronaut Jim Lovell in *Apollo 13*, he's never played a true-life historical figure. Luckily for him, Charlie Wilson made it easy.

"Charlie walks in," Hanks recalls of his first meeting with the former lawmaker (now 74 and recuperating from a heart transplant operation), "and he's wearing cowboy boots, a brown pair of slacks, a purple shirt, and mismatching suspenders with little Spitfire airplanes on them that he's run under the epaulets of his shirt. Half my work was done right there."

The other half turned out to be trickier. Hanks had purchased the screen rights to Crile's book about Wilson shortly after its publication, in 2003, but it took a while for him to figure out how to adapt the story of this wildly unlikely hero. Here was a womanizing, boozing schmoozer who seemed to spend more time flirting with Playmates than crafting legislation as a member of the Congressional Appropriations Committee—where, it turns out, he was quietly procuring billions for the clandestine CIA operations that would ultimately oust the Soviets from Afghanistan. Part of the problem, according to Hanks, was that Wilson's tale is almost too outrageous for the screen, bustling with believe-it-or-not characters like Joanne Herring, the big-haired Southern socialite who helps Wilson cook up his covert plan while he's soaking in her tub and she's combing mascara from her eyelashes with a safety pin (Roberts, incidentally, steals the scene with that harrowing-looking maneuver). "When I read the book, I was like, 'Wait a minute,'" Hanks says. "'This is too farcical! It's too much! You can't put all that in a movie.'"

Eventually, Sorkin packed most of it into what Hanks calls a "rock-'em, sock-'em" script, which the star then dangled under the nose of Mike Nichols. ("Mike was always interested," Hanks says. "We'd be fools not to give it to him.") "I read it," remembers the Oscar-winning director of *The Graduate*, *Silkwood*, and *Working Girl*. "And I thought, 'S---. I'm stuck.'" Nichols rang up Roberts, his favorite actress since the two worked together on 2004's *Closer*, and Hoffman, whom he'd directed on stage in Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Next thing you know, the bunch of them were stuck on a mountaintop in Morocco making a movie in the middle of a monsoon. "We ended up having to reshoot a lot of that [Pakistan refugee camp] scene in Los Angeles," Nichols says of a location sequence that got scuttled by floods last winter. "I'm thinking of offering a cash prize on the DVD to anyone who can spot which part was shot in Morocco and which in Mystery Mesa." The weather issues added to the film's total budget—about $75 million—but nobody at Universal complained too much. "With the pedigree of the people involved—Mike Nichols, Julia, Phil, me... This wasn't a brave movie for the studio to make," Hanks notes slyly.

At least it wasn't at the time. Today, though, after watching so many others go down in flames, opening a political-themed movie, even an upbeat one with Tom and Julia, must make Universal execs feel like they're about to live through the first 20 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan*. The odds seem to be against them. "I know, I know, it's got

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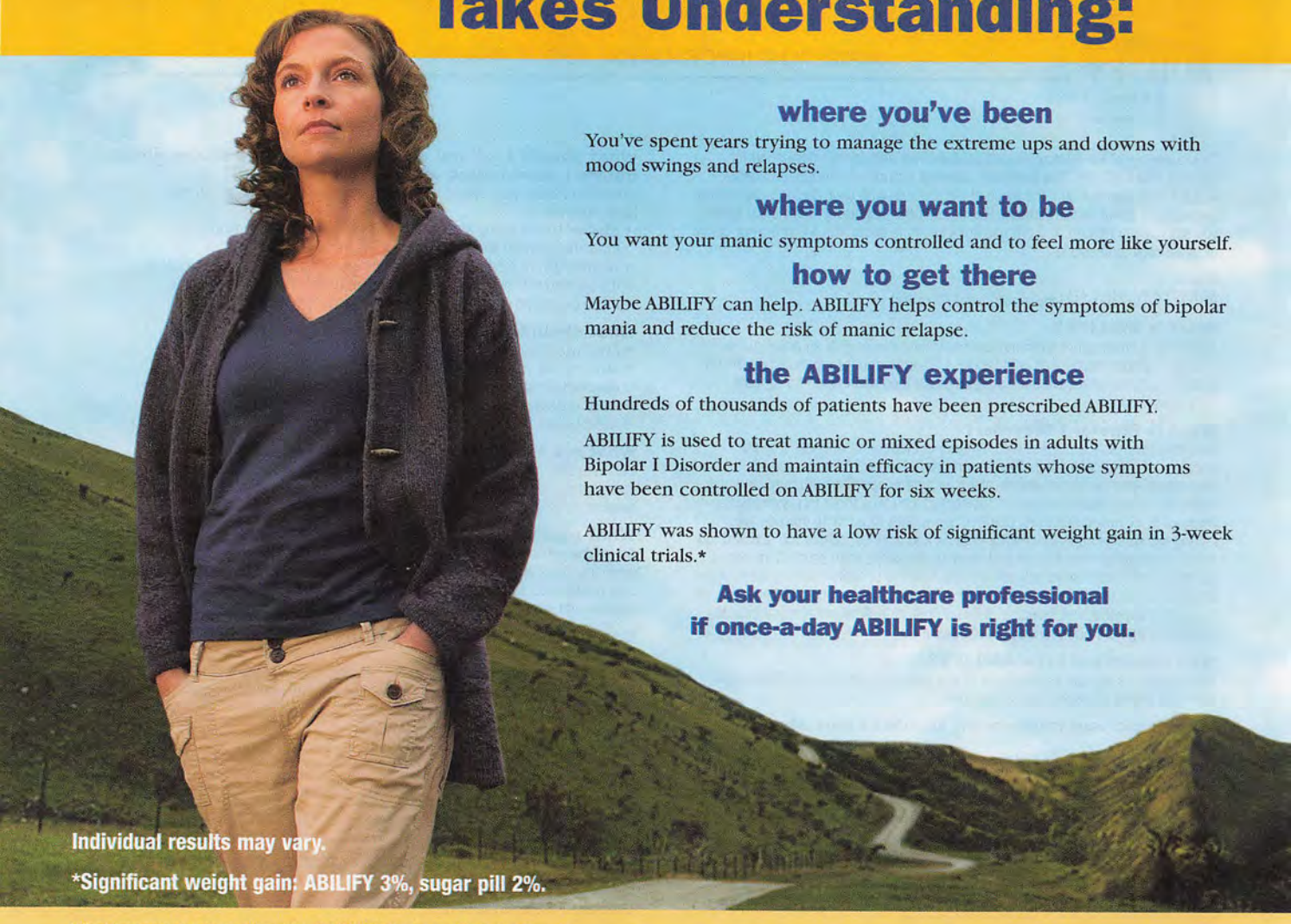

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What important information should I know about ABILIFY?

Elderly patients, diagnosed with psychosis as a result of dementia (for example, an inability to perform daily activities as a result of increased memory loss), and who are treated with atypical antipsychotic medicines including ABILIFY, are at an increased risk of death when compared to patients who are treated with a placebo (sugar pill). ABILIFY is not approved for the treatment of patients with dementia-related psychosis.

Serious side effects can occur with any antipsychotic medicine, including ABILIFY. Tell your doctor or healthcare professional right away if you have any conditions or side effects, including the following:

Neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS): Very high fever, rigid muscles, shaking, confusion, sweating, or increased heart rate and blood pressure **may be signs of NMS, a rare but serious side effect that could be fatal.**

Tardive dyskinesia (TD): Abnormal or uncontrollable facial movements may be signs of a serious condition known as TD, which may be permanent.

Elderly patients with dementia: An increased risk of stroke and ministroke has been reported in a clinical study of elderly patients with dementia (for example, increased memory loss and inability to perform daily activities). ABILIFY is not approved for treating patients with dementia.

High blood sugar and diabetes: Patients with diabetes and those having risk factors for diabetes (for example, obesity, family history of diabetes), as well as those with symptoms such as unexpected increases in thirst, urination, or hunger should have their blood sugar levels checked before and during treatment. Increases in blood sugar levels (hyperglycemia), in some cases serious and associated with coma or death, have been reported in patients taking medicines like ABILIFY.

Orthostatic hypotension: Lightheadedness or faintness caused by a sudden change in heart rate and blood pressure when rising too quickly from a sitting or lying position (orthostatic hypotension) has been reported with ABILIFY.

Dysphagia: Medicines like ABILIFY have been associated with swallowing problems (dysphagia). If you had or have swallowing problems, you should tell your doctor or healthcare professional.

Suicidal thoughts: If you have suicidal thoughts, you should tell your doctor or healthcare professional right away.

What should I tell my doctor or healthcare professional before I start taking ABILIFY (aripiprazole)?

Information about your overall health, and any medical problems you may have, such as:

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- Whether you're pregnant, plan to become pregnant, or are breast-feeding
- If you or anyone in your family has had seizures
- If you or anyone in your family has had high blood sugar or diabetes

What should I avoid when taking ABILIFY?

- Avoid overheating and dehydration
- Avoid driving or operating hazardous machinery until you know how ABILIFY affects you
- Avoid drinking alcohol
- Avoid breast-feeding an infant

What are the common side effects of ABILIFY?

Common side effects include: headache, anxiety, insomnia, nausea, vomiting, constipation, dizziness, upset stomach, and an inner sense of restlessness or need to move (akathisia).

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the word *war* in the title, and it takes you to foreign countries where there's lots of rubble and people wear turbans and have beards," groans Sorkin. "But, honestly, I promise this movie is not a schlepp. It doesn't make anybody eat their vegetables or try to persuade you to a certain political point of view. I mean, it opens in a hotel suite in Las Vegas."

Sorkin's script, in fact, does not include a single reference to al-Qaeda, suicide bombers, or even the Taliban—although in one early draft he did end the film with a portentous allusion to the Twin Towers. Instead, the point that some of the rockets the CIA slipped into Afghanistan in the 1980s wound up in the hands of people like Osama bin Laden is made more subtly. Toward the close of the film, a poignant Zen parable pops up in Hoffman's dialogue about the uncertain, unknowable future, and a quote by Charlie Wilson about how America "f---ed up the endgame" in Afghanistan appears on screen at the end (for the more politically attuned, there are also shout-outs in the script to John Murtha and Rudy Giuliani). "We didn't want to hit anyone over the head with it," Sorkin explains. "We assumed the people watching wouldn't be any dumber than the people who made the movie. That they would get it."

The fact that the film takes place 20 years ago should make it go down a bit smoother with today's war-weary audience. "I think these sorts of things need distance," Roberts says. "You can't really make a movie about what's going on right now. You can't watch the war on the news at 6 p.m. and then go out and see a controlled version of that same war at a 7:20 show. It's confusing and disrespectful." Nichols puts it slightly differently. "Our movie isn't about 9/11 or the war in Iraq," he says. "Those things are beneath the surface. They're unstated. Unspoken. But everybody knows they're there."

Something else is unstated and unspoken beneath the surface of *Charlie Wilson's War*—the place Hanks and Roberts occupy in the new anarchy of Hollywood.

Perhaps more than any other actors who rose up in the 1990s, these two defined what it meant to be on top during that decade. They both broke through around the same time (see sidebar) and ascended on separate but parallel trajectories to levels of success undreamt of even in Beverly Hills. In addition to receiving multiple Oscar nominations—and three wins—during that period, Hanks started commanding $20 million a picture (reportedly earning tens of millions more in profit point deals on films like *Forrest Gump*), while Roberts finished the '90s as the first female to crash the $20 million barrier (for *Erin Brockovich*, for which she also earned her Oscar). For a time, their names above a title were believed to all but guarantee a hit—and, for a time, they sort of did. Add them together and Hanks' and Roberts' grosses in the U.S. alone total $5.5 billion, roughly the amount Charlie Wilson spent kicking the Russians out of Afghanistan.

But, of course, star power isn't what it used to be—not when Tom Cruise can't help his last movie, *Lions for Lambs,* earn more than a measly $15 million. Except for franchises (the *Ocean's* sequels and the Dan Brown adaptations), neither Roberts nor Hanks has had a megahit since the turn of the century. Granted, Roberts has been in semiretirement since getting married and having kids, acting mostly in animated films when she's acting at all. And Hanks hasn't exactly been idle: In addition to his HBO projects, he'll costar with his son Colin in *The Great Buck Howard,* which will debut at Sundance this January, before moving on

Flashback: 1988

Iran-contra was still scandalizing the nation, George W. Bush's dad was elected president, and two actors began their journey to pop icon status. By Jeff Jensen

Tom goes for the *Punch*

Hanks was coming off a series of misfires (*The Man With One Red Shoe*, *Volunteers*, *The Money Pit*) and one modest hit that wasn't really his (Dan Aykroyd's *Dragnet*). All that changed on June 3 with the opening of *Big*, the man-boy comedy that earned Hanks his first Oscar nomination, not to mention his first $100 million blockbuster. (His reported salary: $2 million.) But the movie that truly changed his image opened on Sept. 30: *Punchline*, in which he played a self-destructive stand-up comedian opposite Sally Field. The film, which grossed $21 million, was anything but big. But *Punchline* showed Hanks' range and set the stage for the dramas that would define him in the decade to come. "There's a scene where I make this really feeble romantic play for Sally's character, which I think is some of the best work I've ever done," Hanks said in 2001. "I'm still astounded by it."

Julia delivers *Mystic Pizza*

At the beginning of 1988, Roberts was an aspiring starlet hoping for a big break—and she got one. Well, two, actually, if you count *Satisfaction*, the girl-band flop starring Justine Bateman that opened on Feb. 12. On Oct. 21 (just as *Punchline* was falling flat at the box office), Roberts headlined an acclaimed dramedy, *Mystic Pizza*, which earned her a Best Actress nomination from the Independent Spirit Awards. (Her reported salary: $50,000.) Hollywood took notice. One year later, Roberts earned her first Oscar nod with *Steel Magnolias*. The year after that: *Pretty Woman*. Later, Roberts would recall: "The first time I truly felt famous was when I went to the movies with my mom. I had gone to the loo, and someone in the bathroom said in a very loud voice, 'Girl in stall No. 1, were you in *Mystic Pizza*?' I paused and I said, 'Yeah, that was me.'"

HANKS: 20TH CENTURY FOX FILM CORP./EVERETT COLLECTION; ROBERTS: SAMUEL GOLDWYN/EVERETT COLLECTION

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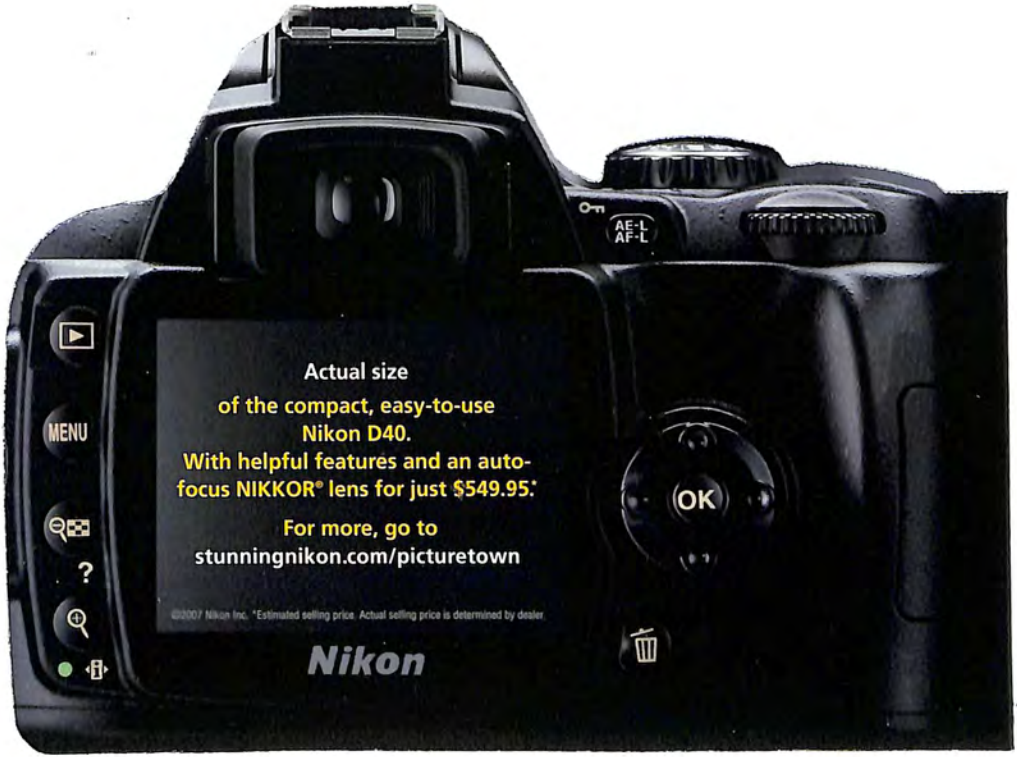
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Casualties of War

It's been a hard season for political-minded movies at the box office. Here's a look at the walking wounded. —Jeff Labrecque

1. *The Kingdom*
Director Peter Berg flexed his inner Bruckheimer with this thriller about an elite FBI unit sent to Saudi Arabia. The most successful of the bunch.
GROSS: $47.5m

2. *Rendition*
Standard op-ed talking points such as deportation and torture are apparently no sexier when they feature Reese Witherspoon and Jake Gyllenhaal in leading roles.
GROSS: $9.7m

3. *In the Valley of Elah*
Audiences failed to materialize for Paul Haggis' critically lauded drama about a father (Tommy Lee Jones) investigating the mystery behind his GI son's death.
GROSS: $6.8m

4. *Lions for Lambs*
Even a dream team of Tom Cruise, Meryl Streep, and Robert Redford couldn't salvage this talkathon about neoconservatism and the mainstream media.
GROSS: $14.8m

5. *A Mighty Heart*
Though Angelina Jolie won raves as slain reporter Daniel Pearl's pregnant wife, Mariane, the grim real-life story lost summer filmgoers to more frivolous fare.
GROSS: $9.2m

JAMIE FOXX: FRANK CONNOR; WITHERSPOON: SAM EMERSON; JAMES FRANCO AND JONES: LOREY SEBASTIAN; CRUISE: FRANCOIS DUHAMEL; JOLIE: PETER MOUNTAIN

to higher-profile projects like Ron Howard's *Da Vinci* follow-up, *Angels & Demons*. But *Charlie Wilson's War* is precisely the sort of tricky picture that could use a sprinkling of their old '90s-style magic.

"I am no guarantee that a movie is going to be a success," Hanks states flatly. "I am no guarantee that a movie is going to touch the national zeitgeist. The only thing I can guarantee is that it will be news if it does and it will be news if it doesn't." What's changed in the entertainment universe, Hanks thinks, is that "the audience has figured out there is no connection from one of my movies to the next. The audience has become smart about stars. So it's chaos out there now. Nobody has any idea why people are going to see a movie. Nobody knows what's going to be a hit or what's going to be irrelevant. There are no new models. The new paradigm in Hollywood is that there is no new paradigm."

Come to think of it, that sounds a lot like the *old* paradigm—"Nobody knows anything," as William Goldman famously nailed it in 1983—but then Hollywood has always been an uncertain place. In any case, Roberts has been forced to adjust to the new realities of the movie star business too. "I've actually gone on a pop culture fast," she says. "The TV shows and gossip magazines—it seems so polluting and toxic now. It's exhausting just looking at a newsstand these days. Your eyes cross. You can't even focus. People aren't as interested in making a cool movie or constructing interesting characters. Now it's just about being big and shiny and fabulous."

Charlie Wilson's War is as cool a movie as any Roberts or Hanks has made these past couple of years. It's certainly chock-full of interesting characters. And even in this uncertain decade, they're still pretty big and shiny and fabulous. Who knows, maybe that's enough to get the world interested in...the world. ■

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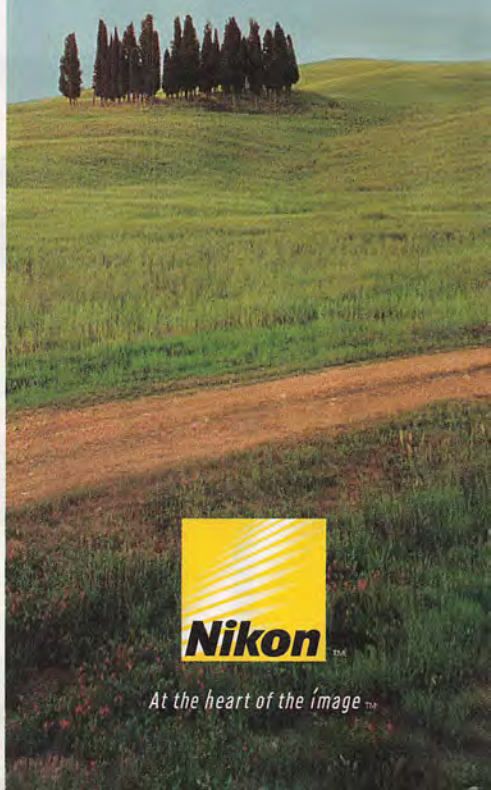

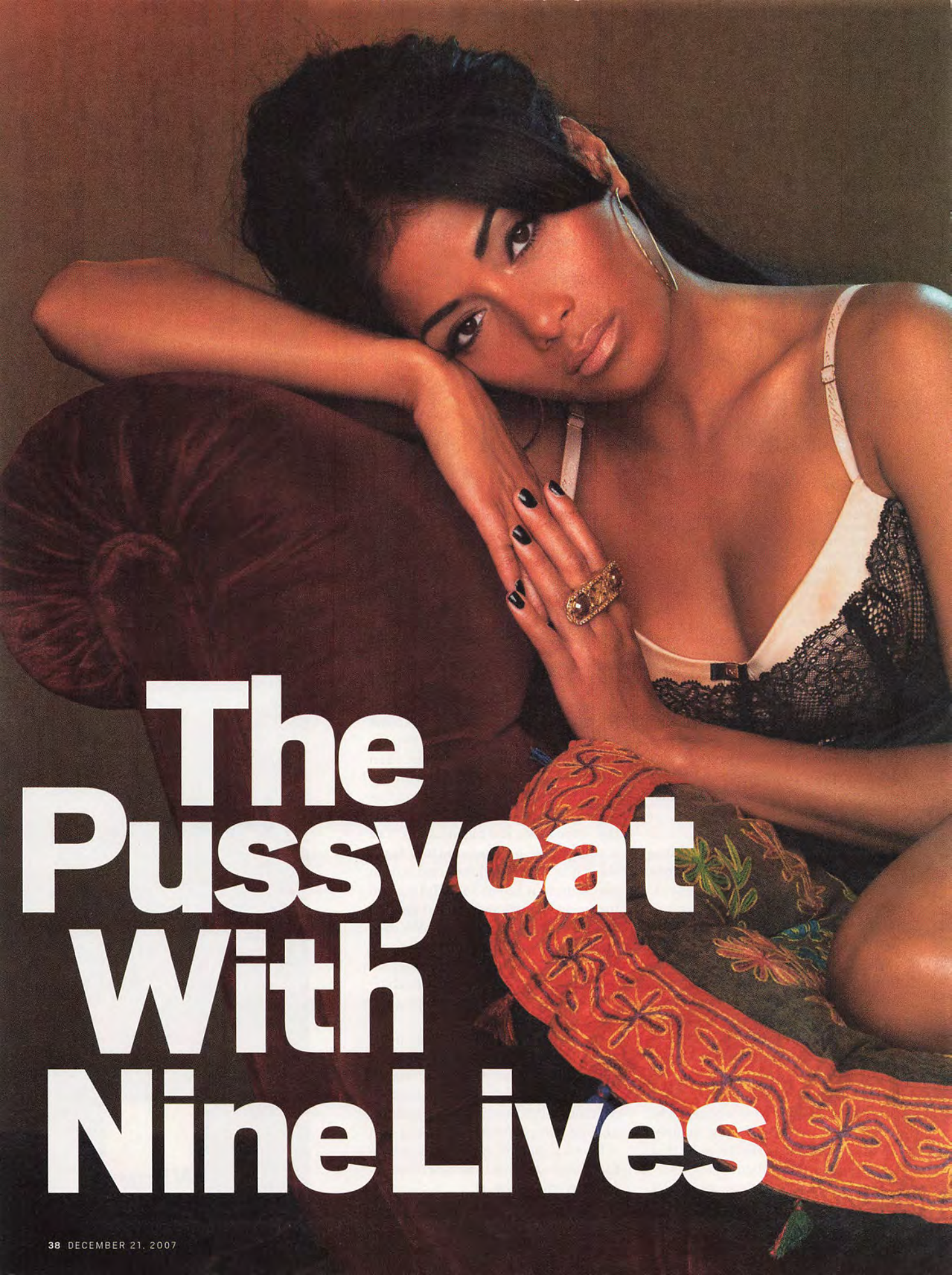

The Pussycat With Nine Lives

Pussycat Doll vixen **NICOLE SCHERZINGER** was supposed to unveil her debut solo album this year. Three release dates passed. Three singles failed. Yet the label still insists she's a star. Will the public ever see it the same way? BY TIM STACK

Nicole Scherzinger simply isn't perspiring enough. "More sweat!" yells a production staffer on the Long Beach, Calif., set of the video for "Whatever U Like," the first single from Scherzinger's solo album, *Her Name Is Nicole*. "We need more sweat *now*! The more sweat, the better! We want her to look like she's in hell!" Immediately, a production assistant hands the singer a spray bottle filled with some kind of mysterious glistening concoction, which she spritzes over her cappuccino-colored skin from head to toe. Finally, Scherzinger is adequately moisturized and work continues.

It's a small problem, with an easy (though slightly messy) solution. Unfortunately, it's about the only *small* problem Interscope Records has had since signing Scherzinger, lead singer of the multiplatinum girl group the Pussycat Dolls, to a solo record deal almost three years ago. At the time, the decision made perfect sense—the Dolls have sold 6 million records worldwide, largely due to Scherzinger's ability to drop it like it's hot while delivering raspily sexy vocals on hits including "Don't Cha" and "Stickwitu" (which earned a 2006 Grammy nod). Sensing they may have found their next Gwen Stefani or Fergie, the label aligned Scherzinger with an all-star roster of producers, including Timbaland, Ne-Yo, and will.i.am—and then waited for the moneymaking magic to happen. Today, they're still waiting.

Photograph by Randall Slavin

Scherzinger performs solo on Dec. 2 at *Movies Rock*; (inset) with Ne-Yo and Iovine

"I am a very conservative Catholic. I came [into my Pussycat Dolls audition] with a big huge blouse, buttoned all the way to the top, and my glasses, because I couldn't see."

Over the last year, EW met with Scherzinger three times: in the recording studio, on the set of her first video, and at a rehearsal space in Burbank. But after three failed singles and three official release dates, *Her Name Is Nicole* still hasn't dropped. (The album is now tentatively scheduled for late February or early March.) Today, the label still has no proof that Scherzinger can be a star without her Pussycat sisters—but the singer is not letting the problems undermine her faith in herself. "I've been working on trying to get a solo deal for 10 years straight," Scherzinger told EW in October. "Now that it's crunch time, I'm scared. I hope [people] get me. I hope they see the truth and the heart of what I do. And will they even care? How could they not care?"

Here's the first surprise upon meeting Nicole Scherzinger: The vixen known for purring *"Don't cha wish your girlfriend was a freak like me?"* used to be—gasp!—a theater geek. "One year I wore only all black," she says of her life as a teen. "My friends were so artsy. We would sing musicals and stuff. It kept us out of trouble." Another surprise is her Southern twang—something she drops entirely when on stage. (Although she was born in Hawaii, she spent her childhood in "Luuhhhhville," Kentucky.) Scherzinger's love of music led her to leave college after two years to sing backup for rockers Days of the New. In 1999, she went to L.A. to record with the band, and the humble Southern girl was instantly seduced by Hollywood. "I was staying at the Wyndham Bel Age," she remembers. "I had never stayed anywhere nice before. I had a big queen-size bed and I was jumping up and down. I was like, 'There's the Viper Room! That's where River Phoenix died! I've totally made it!'"

When her mother caught a commercial seeking contestants for The WB's *Making the Band*-style reality series *Popstars*, Scherzinger decided to try out. The gambit paid off: She ended up winning a spot as one of five members of *Popstars*' made-for-TV girl group, Eden's Crush. They landed one successful single in 2001, "Get Over Yourself (Goodbye)," but then made like the song and swiftly disbanded. Using her Hawaiian family name, Nicole Kea, because it was easier to pronounce, she peddled a demo CD to labels in hopes of a solo deal. One trip in August 2003 took Scherzinger to Arista Records' New York office, but fate—or the electric company—intervened: Her performance was interrupted by a citywide blackout. The employees began evacuating the building, but Scherzinger didn't want to leave. "I was like, 'My audition isn't done yet!'" She left the darkened city without a deal.

After a brief detour into acting—including a cameo in the 2003 indie *Chasing Papi*—a friend told Scherzinger about auditions for the Pussycat Dolls, an L.A.-based burlesque group founded by choreographer Robin Antin. The Dolls' late-night routine at the Viper Room had caught the attention of Interscope Records head Jimmy Iovine and A&R legend Ron Fair, who both saw potential for a singing group. Despite the Dolls' retro-risqué look, Scherzinger arrived at her audition ready to wow the label with her talent, not her T&A. "I am a very conservative Catholic," she explains. "I came in with a big huge blouse, buttoned all the way to the top, and my glasses, because I couldn't see. I was just going to sing these people out of the room."

It worked. "She walked in and she sang one of her own songs," remembers Fair. "Jimmy just said, 'That's it.' I was a little more numb from seeing 500 people. He instantly identified her." Soon enough, Scherzinger ditched her sexy-librarian duds for the Dolls' bedazzled bustiers. As their self-titled 2005 debut album took off, so did the Dolls phenomenon, which included a CW reality series, *The Search for the Next Doll*, and a PCD-themed casino at Caesar's Palace. Scherzinger, who also lent her vocals to Timbaland's *Shock Value* and Diddy's "Come to Me," kept hounding the label for a solo shot. "I was relentless with Ron and Jimmy from day one," she says. "I said, 'You gotta give me a chance, man. I know I can do this.'"

Scherzinger began recording *Her Name Is Nicole* in 2005, while touring with the Dolls. EW was alongside the singer in the studio this past January as she worked with Future Cut, a powerhouse producing duo responsible for Lily Allen's hit single "Smile." (The track was ultimately not chosen.) Meanwhile, singer-songwriter Ne-Yo gave Scherzinger two songs that were originally written for Britney Spears, including one with the all-too-appropriate title "Save Me From Myself." He explains that after Spears' infamous head-shaving

(PP. 38–39) STYLING: PAULA BRADLEY/MARGARET MALDONADO; SET STYLIST: DAVID ROSS/ARTMIX BEAUTY: HAIR: FRANKIE PAYNE/LUXE; MAKEUP: TROY JENSEN/MARGARET MALDONADO; DRESS: DOLCE & GABBANA; (THIS PAGE) SCHERZINGER: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE; SCHERZINGER, NE-YO, AND IOVINE: SETH BROWARNIK/WIREIMAGE

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meltdown in February, he couldn't get in touch with the singer or her management: "In the midst of all of that, I met Nicole."

Two years after recording began, Scherzinger finally gave fans a taste of her solo sound. The first track, the club thumper "Whatever U Like," produced by hitmaker Polow Da Don ("Buttons," "London Bridge"), arrived in August to little fanfare. (It peaked at No. 83 on *Billboard*'s Pop 100.) EW has learned, however, that Interscope never shipped the song to radio and wanted to use the single to introduce Scherzinger as a solo singer. "I was surprised," says Polow Da Don of the song's failure to connect. "I think it was a timing thing. We did that record almost two years ago, and pop music in general is a little different." Scherzinger's first "official" single was "Baby Love," an "Irreplaceable"-esque jam produced by and featuring will.i.am that showcased a softer, more romantic sound. This time the single only managed to reach No. 75. "We watched to see if pop stations that supported the Dolls would support [these singles], and they really didn't," says Ebro Darden, programming director for New York's Hot 97. "I'm not convinced people had made emotional investments in her as an artist." Adds a top music manager: "She just happened to be the best-looking one [in the Pussycat Dolls]. Does she have marginal talent as a singer? Sure. But is she a star? I don't think so. I can't even tell you her last name." Still determined to change that perception, the label pushed forth her latest track, "Supervillain," on Nov. 13—but only for download.

If a *fourth* single—which the label plans to release in January—also fails to generate heat, Interscope may not want to release *Her Name Is Nicole* at all. To be fair, album delays are just the cost of doing business in the music industry—and Iovine is notorious for holding discs until they're up to his standards. Just this year, the label held 50 Cent's *Curtis* for three months; it went on to debut at No. 2, selling 691,000 the first week. Artists like Gavin Rossdale, whose own solo effort has been on the shelf for years, fondly calls it being in "Jimmy Jail." The Interscope head tells EW he won't apologize for keeping discs hostage: "I will not put anyone's album out in this climate unless it's properly set up with the right songs."

Finding herself amongst talented "Jimmy Jail" cellmates, Scherzinger says she isn't worried about the wait. "If it was all left up to me, it would probably never come out, because I'm such a perfectionist. But it's all in the right time. It'll happen the beginning of next year, and I'm loving the new stuff that I've come up with." Still, all this reworking comes with a price, and not just for Scherzinger. Interscope won't officially comment on specific costs, but an outside source estimates that the label has laid out at least $1.5 million so far on recording and videos. The delays have also kept Scherzinger from recording a second album with the Dolls, potentially hampering the group's momentum. The Dolls are tentatively scheduled to return to the studio next year—and EW has learned that Interscope may rework some of Scherzinger's discarded solo tracks for the band's next album.

If her disc ever does see the light of day, fans can expect upbeat, pleasant pop (at least based on the tracks EW has heard). Highlights are the sexy, funky "Physical," produced by Timbaland; an ode to female genitalia called "Puakenikeni" (also the name of a Hawaiian flower); "Just Say Yes," an elegant ballad penned by Snow Patrol's Gary Lightbody; and a duet between Scherzinger and Iovine pal Sting called "Power's Out." Added to this lineup are the three previously released singles, along with the Britney tracks and a new song Scherzinger recorded with rising star The-Dream. "Her album is what the game needs right now because it's so diverse and it's so different," says Polow Da Don. "It reminds me of when I first heard Alanis Morissette or Norah Jones." The singer, meanwhile, believes that one day people will in fact know who she is—by her first *and* last names. "It isn't until you think you're on top of the mountain and then you get rejected time after time after time—it isn't until you go through all those things in life that you're like, Okay, *now* let me make my music." ■ *(Additional reporting by Shirley Halperin)*

PCD at the 2006 American Music Awards; (inset) Scherzinger (far left) with Eden's Crush and Hillary Clinton in 2001

Disc Jockeying

Scherzinger's not alone: Here are three other new artists with albums awaiting release.

SAIGON
This *Entourage* rapper, who signed a real deal with Atlantic in 2004, has yet to drop his debut, *The Greatest Story Never Told*.

LIL MAMA
The "Lip Gloss" rapper's debut was due in October. Her next single, out in early '08, will feature Chris Brown and T-Pain.

KERI HILSON
The singer of "The Way I Are" is in Atlanta with Timbaland, working on her much-anticipated solo album.

THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS: MICHAEL CAULFIELD/WIREIMAGE; EDEN'S CRUSH: KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE; LIL MAMA: JOHN SHEARER/WIREIMAGE; KERI HILSON: BEN ROSE/WIREIMAGE

By Chris Nashawaty

The Trials of Wesley Snipes

Once heralded for his butt-kicking roles in *Blade* and *Passenger 57*, Wesley Snipes is now waging a new fight: to clear his name amid allegations of tax fraud. In an exclusive interview, the actor speaks out on Hollywood, lawsuits, and his decade of woe.

Ten years ago, it was hard to be a bigger star than Wesley Snipes was. The Bronx-bred actor with the brooding good looks and the menacing physicality to back them up was routinely earning between $7 and $10 million per film. He was costarring with A-list actors like Robert De Niro and Sean Connery. And his movies were making money hand over fist. *New Jack City. Jungle Fever. White Men Can't Jump. Passenger 57. Rising Sun. Waiting to Exhale.* By the time he donned a black leather coat and dark sunglasses to play a half-human, half-vampire avenger in 1998's *Blade*, Snipes wasn't just one of the most popular African-American actors in Hollywood; he was fast becoming one of its biggest stars, period.

Since then, things haven't gone quite as one might have predicted. Over the past few years, Snipes' films have been shot on the cheap in places like Bulgaria, Romania, and Namibia. They've featured interchangeable titles like *The Contractor* and *The Detonator* and costars who are B- or C-list talents at best. The onetime power-list staple's paydays have taken a nosedive too, sometimes sinking to around $2 million per film. And the last five movies he's released have bypassed theaters altogether and gone directly to DVD.

What happened?

The better question might be: What didn't happen? For much of the past decade, Snipes has been mired in one legal scandal and publicity nightmare after another. Some of these were due to bad luck. Others seem to have been the result of bad judgment. And yet others, like the federal tax-fraud indictment Snipes currently faces, are so convoluted and downright bizarre that it's hard to figure out who's to blame.

Snipes has remained silent through it all. He's sat by as his reputation has taken devastating hits and offers from the major Hollywood studios have dried up. He's allowed other people to unspool the strange details of his once charmed life in the press. And considering his silence, it was easy to jump to the conclusion that maybe those rumors and accusations against him were true.

But on a wintry morning last month at his home in suburban New Jersey, Snipes finally agreed to talk. The only question is whether it's too late. After

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN SCHOELLER

With Harrelson in *White Men Can't Jump*; (below) in *New Jack City*

> **Because of the litigation and things that have been written, I thought it was time to share a little insight about where I'm coming from.**

all, Snipes' career isn't the only thing that's in jeopardy. His freedom is too. Because next month, Snipes will stand before a jury that may convict him and send him to prison for 16 years.

At the end of a leafy cul-de-sac an hour's drive from New York City, Snipes' spread is both remarkable and unremarkable. It's a huge stucco estate with postcard views and endless lawns. And yet it's virtually identical to every other million-dollar house on the block. A Snipes employee answers the door, stepping inside to reveal an airy marble foyer flanked by a pair of life-size African statues. On one side is a male warrior holding a spear; on the other, a proud tribal mother nursing an infant. In between the two stands a fit 45-year-old man dressed in a dashiki, flashing a thousand-watt smile.

Snipes leads the way into a spacious living room and takes a seat in a hand-carved wooden throne. It looks like something from the Broadway version of *The Lion King*. The Snipes attendant places plates of fresh fruit on the coffee table in front of his boss, who launches headfirst into why he's agreed to this meeting. "I've been trying to keep the private life private," he explains in a calm voice. "Not being savvy or trained on how to do good interviews like a politician, I thought it was wiser to follow my mother's advice: If you have nothing good to say, don't say anything at all." But, he adds, "I think now, because of the litigation, because of certain things that have been written...I thought it was time to share a little insight about where I'm coming from, how happy I am, how in-shape I am, and that life is good."

Judging by his surroundings—the kids' toys that litter the living room, the opulence, the staff serving fresh fruit—life does indeed appear to be good. But, of course, it is not. Next month, Snipes will face trial on eight counts of tax fraud in a federal courthouse in Ocala, Fla. In its October 2006 indictment, the U.S. Attorney's Office alleged that Snipes (along with his financial adviser Eddie Ray Kahn and his long-distance accountant Douglas P. Rosile) attempted to defraud the IRS of more than $11 million in bogus refund claims for the tax years 1996 and 1997, and moreover, that Snipes did not file returns at all for the years 1999 to 2004.

When the indictment was unsealed, Snipes was in Namibia (on the southwest coast of Africa) shooting an independently financed zombie Western called *Gallowwalker*. And when the actor did not immediately turn himself in to federal authorities, his absence—and the fact that Namibia doesn't have an extradition treaty with the U.S.—fueled speculation in the press that Snipes wasn't just a celebrity tax cheat but also a fugitive.

Now, a year later, Snipes laughs at these allegations. "They positioned it like, 'He's irresponsible, dangerous, guilty—this is why he's in Africa,'" he says. "All these things, they play into our stereotypes. People think I'm Nino Brown [his gangster character from 1991's *New Jack City*] or Blade. They think I'm an evil dude." When asked who "they" are, Snipes replies, "People in positions of authority and who control mass media."

Snipes maintains that when he first learned of the indictment, he and his attorneys immediately contacted the IRS and began negotiating his return to the States to turn himself in. But because his agreement with the IRS allowed him to delay his surrender in order to accommodate *Gallowwalker*'s shooting schedule, it appeared as though he was stalling for time—that he was guilty. In December, Snipes chartered a private jet, flew from Namibia to Orlando, and turned himself in to the U.S. Marshals—ironically, the very same agency that he'd once observed and gotten to know while making 1998's *U.S. Marshals*, the sequel to *The Fugitive*.

Snipes flatly denies all of the government's charges against him and insists that he filed returns for all of the years in question. And while he admits that yes, with the assistance of Kahn and Rosile, he did request refunds totaling $11.4 million for 1996 and 1997 taxes he paid, he never did so with the intent to defraud the IRS. Instead, he claims he was merely following the counsel of his advisers. "The accountants say you're entitled to a refund because of these particular rules and regulations," he says. "So you say all right.... If someone tells me I'm entitled to a refund, I'll go for the refund!"

Snipes admits that these refund requests may have been a bit aggressive (they allegedly hinge on a discredited tax-protester gambit called the "861 argument," which claims that the domestic income of U.S. citizens is not taxable). But he argues that if

(P. 44) GROOMING: JANE CHOI/ARTWING; PROP STYLING: SCOTT KNIGHT; (THIS PAGE) *WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP*: NEIL LEIFER

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Alas, Poor Wesley

Recent years haven't been kind to Snipes, who's seen his share of legal drama. A look at his run of outrageous misfortune.

May 2000
Snipes' security company tries to buy land near religious cult in Georgia.

January 2002
The actor is slapped with paternity suit, which is later thrown out.

April 2005
Snipes files suit against New Line over alleged slights on *Blade: Trinity*.

June 2005
Stopped in Johannesburg with allegedly fake South African passport.

October 2006
Charged with eight counts of tax fraud. Trial starts next month.

> I found it fascinating how easy it was for people to jump on the 'Wesley's the bad guy' bandwagon. That's where the systematic racism comes in.

the IRS had a problem with the claims, then it was obligated to meet with him if he so desired. He says that he made that request, but the government indicted him instead of granting him the meeting. When contacted to respond for this story, the U.S. Attorney's Office declined to comment, saying only, "We will do our talking in the courtroom."

In the meantime, Snipes remains baffled by the charges, especially since he claims he was never paid the refunds in the first place. "I never got a dime," he insists. "I didn't defraud the government by taking money that was not mine. We never got it!" Snipes says that the reason the IRS is targeting him has nothing to do with money at all, but rather his fame—that his arrest would be a high-profile trophy to deter others from claiming similar refunds. "Oh, it ain't about the money," he says. "What is the benefit of making such pomp and circumstance about this case? The amazing revelation in all of this is, I never thought I was that important."

Both Rosile and Kahn have pleaded not guilty. When reached for comment, Rosile's lawyer would say only, "My client has never met Mr. Snipes." According to the indictment, Rosile's CPA licenses in Ohio and Florida had been revoked; he is currently free on bail. Kahn, meanwhile, is in federal custody awaiting trial and could not be reached for comment. Still, if Snipes' strategy next month in court is to blame his advisers, then it raises a question—not a legal one, perhaps, but a commonsense one: Didn't he think that his accountants' promises of multimillion-dollar refunds were too good to be true?

Snipes laughs at this suggestion. "Hell yeah, it sounded too good to be true!"

While it would be nice to say that Snipes' problems end there, they do not. In fact, they're just one layer of his misery.

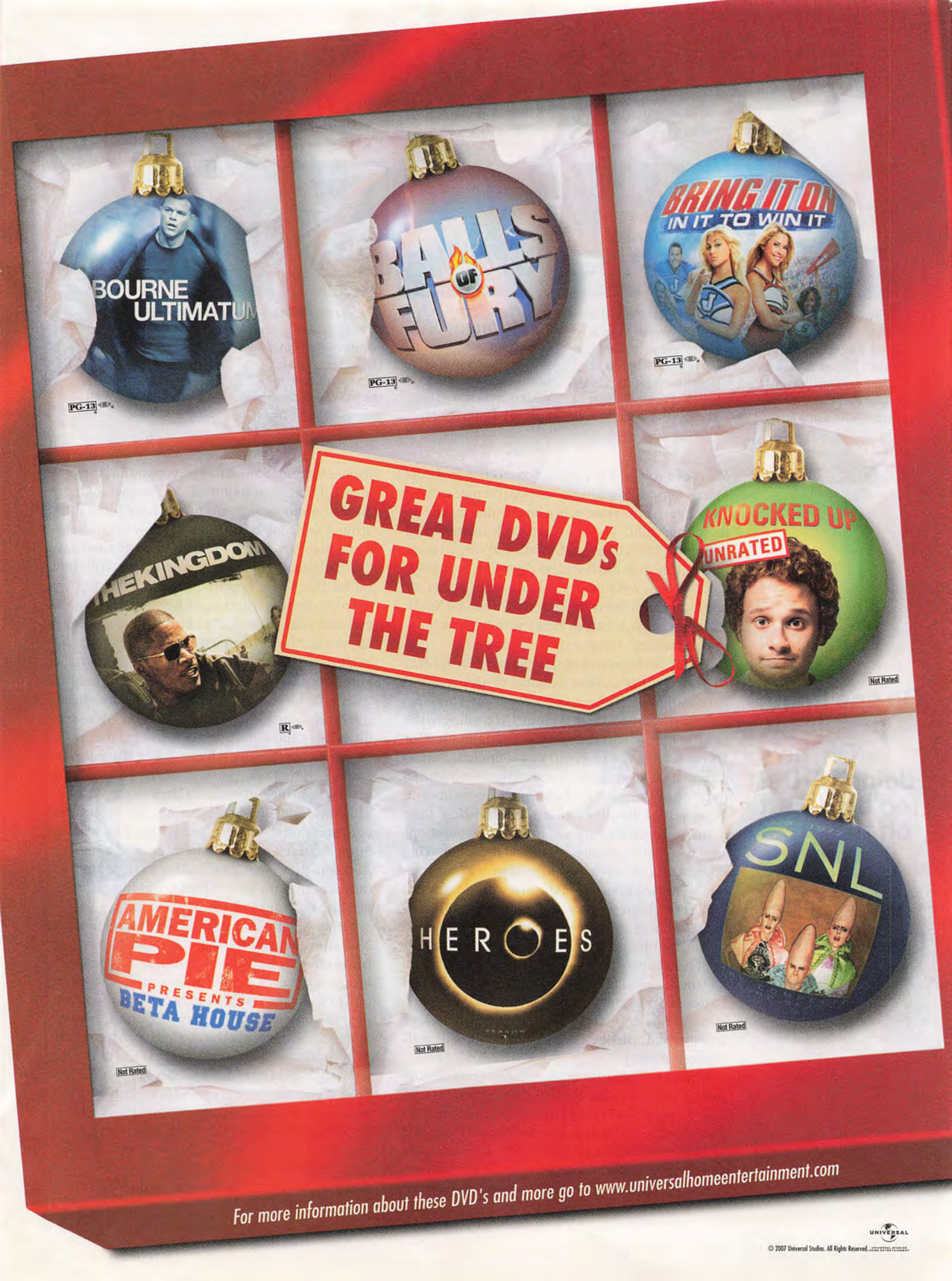
Wesley Snipes was a small child. So small that his mother thought her oldest of eight might not grow at all—that he might be a dwarf. Because of his small size throughout junior high school in the South Bronx, Snipes was routinely beaten up. He remembers his family as being "broke as a joke," but his mother, a dancer and community activist, scraped together the money to send him to a local YMCA to take karate lessons. Thirty-five years later, the classically trained actor holds a fifth-degree black belt in karate, a third-degree black belt in tae kwon do, and teaching sashes in kung fu and Brazilian capoeira. His wife, Nakyung, with whom he has four children, also holds a black belt in karate.

During Snipes' brilliant box office run in the '90s, he seemed like an actor afraid of being pinned down. He played the romantic lead in 1991's *Jungle Fever*, the motormouthed con artist in 1992's *White Men Can't Jump*, and even a woman named Noxeema Jackson trapped inside a man's body in 1995's *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*. But Snipes never strayed too far from martial arts. When he landed the action-hero role in *Blade*, he seemed to have found the part that would vault him to Hollywood's most rarefied level.

In 1998, the first installment of the *Blade* saga grossed $70 million for New Line. Four years later, *Blade II* pulled in $82 million. That trajectory should have made the third chapter, 2004's *Blade: Trinity*, an even bigger hit. Snipes' agents negotiated a $13 million payday for the actor—his highest salary ever. But the movie, which should have been the climax of his 25-year career, instead ended in a lawsuit.

Over the course of four hours with Snipes, it is easy to see how he became a star in the first place. He is intelligent, funny, and charming. But the actor also seems to have a natural gift for playing the

SPHINX: MARVIN E. NEWMAN/GETTY IMAGES; PREGNANCY TEST: CREATAS IMAGES/JUPITERIMAGES.COM; *BLADE: TRINITY*: DIYAH PERA; SNIPES AND MICROPHONES: REINHOLD MATAY/ASSOCIATED PRESS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High Five

He hit the big time with blockbusters like *Blade*, but the actor's personal favorites may surprise you

New Jack City
(1991) A gangster epic set during the crack era, with Snipes as sadistic kingpin Nino Brown. "He was a bad guy," Snipes says with a grin.

The Waterdance
(1992) Snipes plays a ladies' man–turned-paraplegic. "I think I pulled it off pretty good," says the actor. "People said I did, at least."

White Men Can't Jump
(1992) Snipes and Woody Harrelson play hoops hustlers. "That's what movies should be. I got to laugh every day."

To Wong Foo...
(1995) "I played a transvestite nun on Broadway. I knew I could do it. I didn't want Nino to be the last character people remembered me for."

Disappearing Acts
(2000) A made-for-TV romance, with Snipes and Sanaa Lathan as a pair of mismatched lonely hearts.

NEW JACK CITY: WARNER BROS./KOBAL COLLECTION. THE WATERDANCE: SAMUEL GOLDWYN/EVERETT COLLECTION. WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP: 20TH CENTURY FOX/KOBAL COLLECTION. TO WONG FOO: TUREY SEBASTIAN/DISAPPEARING ACTS: EVERETT COLLECTION

offscreen role of the victim. Sometimes that role makes sense, like when he was sued for paternity in 2002 by an Indiana woman who claimed that he fathered her child. (The case was later dismissed when the biological father was found.) But other times, that victim's role has been less clear-cut, as in 2005, when he was detained in Johannesburg after allegedly trying to leave the country with a fake South African passport. Snipes calls the incident a "misunderstanding" but does not elaborate.

Snipes' 2005 lawsuit against New Line regarding *Blade: Trinity* is another example of his perceived persecution. (New Line and EW parent Time Inc. are both owned by Time Warner.) According to the multimillion-dollar suit against the studio, director David S. Goyer, and *Trinity*'s producers, Snipes claimed that his character's screen time was reduced in favor of two new costars, Ryan Reynolds and Jessica Biel. He also contended that New Line didn't pay his full salary and that he was intentionally cut out of casting decisions and the filmmaking process as a whole—a role he said he was contractually entitled to as one of the film's producers.

> **"On one hand, people go, 'Oh, he's doing DVDs! Too bad!' But on the other hand, it's building up my foreign-market value."**

While neither Goyer nor New Line would comment on these allegations, Snipes isn't as inclined to hold his tongue. In fact, he suggests that the color of his skin may have been a factor. "Systematic racism was used to divert focus away from the real issues of an incompetent director and inexperienced producers with a $60 million budget," he says angrily, "and onto the 'insubordinate, difficult, self-immersed actor.'"

Snipes claims the filmmakers did not take his suggestions seriously and that the film suffered as a result. He points to *Trinity*'s underwhelming reviews and box office returns as proof of this (it made just $52 million). "There are so few guys who do action and do it well," Snipes says. "Even fewer who are African-American. Even fewer who have classical-theater training. So a cat like me coming in, I'm bringing all of that to an action movie. I'm not looking at an action movie as something where I just jump around and look beautiful and show my muscles. Since there are so few people that do this and have that pedigree, people disregard their contribution. I think that's what happened on *Blade: Trinity*."

Snipes believes that Goyer, his fellow producers, and New Line treated him like the hired help, or in his words, "the new ho on the block." "I found it fascinating to hear what people said about this project and how easy it was for people to jump on the 'Wesley's the bad guy' bandwagon. That's where I think the systematic racism comes in. We're conditioned in this country to believe that if there's a problem, the black man is usually the culprit." Snipes says that a portion of his salary—$3.6 million, according to the suit—was withheld as punishment. The New Line suit is still pending. "We've had good conversations," he says. But it's hard to see how Snipes' comments will help those conversations. And somehow, the actor holds out hope that not only will the suit be resolved favorably, but there will also be a fourth *Blade* movie.

Either way, the damage to Snipes' career from the New Line suit may take some time to fix. It seems safe to assume that Hollywood studios won't be eager to hire an actor, even a star of Snipes' caliber, who sued one of their own. Which may explain the recent dearth of major studio films on Snipes' résumé. Snipes thinks his being blackballed is partly to blame. "The industry began to believe that I was difficult to work with and a risk," he says. "My lawyers told me, 'Wes, if you sue them, it's going to make a lot of other studio execs nervous and it could be a problem.' And I was like, 'What, you mean I'll be blacklisted?' And that's exactly what they've been trying to do."

Since *Blade: Trinity*, Snipes has appeared in five consecutive movies that have gone directly to DVD.

It's a fact he's not particularly thrilled about but nonetheless tries to see the bright side of. "I actually didn't know these latest films were going straight to DVD," he insists. "They don't tell you that!... There's a perceived stigma that these are lesser-quality films and that somehow the actor has devolved when the movie goes straight to DVD." But, Snipes says, his recent films have been successful overseas, where his popularity hasn't been affected by Stateside gossip columns. "Internationally, I have as large of a fan base—if not larger—than I have domestically. So, on one hand, people go, 'Oh, he's doing DVDs! Too bad!' But on the other hand, it's constantly building up my foreign-market value."

Be that as it may, there's no denying that Snipes is no longer at the top of his career. Perhaps the decade was cursed from the start. In the late '90s, the actor started a security firm called the Royal Guard of Amen-Ra (named after the Egyptian king of the gods) to provide VIPs with bodyguards trained in law enforcement, the military, and martial arts. But in 2000, this sideline business took center stage when wild reports surfaced about supposed ties between the Royal Guard and a Georgia-based religious cult, the United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors.

At the time, the Nuwaubians were based on a 476-acre compound in rural Putnam County, Ga. And their precepts ranged from ancient Egyptian mythology to black nationalism to a belief in extraterrestrials. They were also armed to the teeth. Anyone driving past their property in Georgia might not have known about the gun-toting sentries guarding the compound, but they would've noticed a giant pyramid and sphinx visible from the road. Snipes and his brother (who's also named Wesley Snipes, albeit with a different middle name) tried to purchase some 200 acres of land a couple of miles down the road from the Nuwaubians for the Royal Guard's training academy.

Needless to say, the proximity of the two properties, both with ancient Egyptian motifs and members with gun permits, caught the attention of the Putnam County sheriff—and the imaginations of the tabloids. Snipes denies any connection to the Nuwaubians and chalks the whole thing up to an unlucky coincidence. "It was interpreted as an attempt on my part to start a militia," he says. "This is all false.... I had no idea they were down there. I didn't know who they were!" Snipes begins to crack up. "That's crazy. I'm making movies, man. Who the hell wants to start a militia when you're in the movies?"

Snipes and his brother ended up pulling their offer on the land. Their security company is now based in Florida and Antigua. As for the Nuwaubians, in 2002, 300 state and federal law-enforcement officers raided their compound. "It was really something like what you would see in a Wesley Snipes movie," says Putnam County Det. Sgt. Tracey Bowen. In 2004, the Nuwaubians' leader, Dwight "Malachi" York, was convicted on 10 counts of child molestation and racketeering. He's now serving a 135-year sentence at a federal prison in Colorado.

With Nakyung in 2001

ROBERT MILLARD/ZUMA PRESS

If Snipes is as innocent in all of these legal battles as he insists he is, he may very well be the unluckiest man on the planet. Still, there's something about his coolness in the midst of this mess that's hard not to admire. Even as his federal tax trial approaches, he possesses an almost serene calmness—a Zen-like sense that this too shall pass. His friend and longtime costar Woody Harrelson isn't surprised by Snipes' confidence. Harrelson, who refers to Snipes as his "brother," says he's spoken to the actor recently and that he seems "optimistic...and for good reason."

More than anything, Snipes says he just wants to get back to work. He's particularly excited by the prospect of playing James Brown in a biopic that Spike Lee has been developing. As is Lee: "Wesley is my man to portray the Godfather of Soul," he says. But at this point, Snipes' future in Hollywood seems almost beside the point next to his legal woes. At the end of our conversation, he's asked how he can be so sure that the lawyers and advisers he has now—the ones who seem confident of victory—aren't also giving the kind of bad advice Kahn and Rosile may have given him. Especially when the possible outcome is so severe—again, 16 years in jail. Doesn't this terrify him? What would happen to his wife and his kids?

Snipes thinks this over for a long time. The expression on his face is deflated, wounded. "I understand the risks that are involved," he says quietly. "I don't take this cavalierly. But I am in a spiritual place where I may not react the same way that other people may. At the same time, I have to be prepared to fight tooth and nail.... That's not a black thing, that's not a white thing. That's an American thing." ■

"That's crazy. I'm making movies, man. Who the hell wants to start a militia when you're in the movies?"

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THE MUST LIST

Ten Things We Love This Week

1. 'A CHRISTMAS STORY' MARATHON

What would the holidays be without a leg lamp, a pink bunny suit, and a Red Ryder BB gun? Enjoy them all for 24 hours straight, starting at 8 p.m., Dec. 24, on TBS.

2. THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY

Director Julian Schnabel's beautiful big-screen tale of a French *Elle* editor's paralyzing stroke is a fascinating depiction of the life of one glorious mind.

3. MAD'S GREATEST ARTISTS: DON MARTIN

How warped was *MAD*'s Martin? Even *Far Side* creator Gary Larson—who wrote this collection's foreword—bows at his altar.

4. LOVE HATE, The-Dream

One of the songwriting minds behind Rihanna's summer smash busts out from under "Umbrella" with his sleek, randy solo debut.

5. Kid Sister's "PRO NAILS" video

Kanye West guests on an ode to manis and acrylic tips that's finger-tapping good. *(youtube.com/watch?v=BeCp6nLPQ8Q)*

6. JENNIFER GARNER in 'Juno'

Yes, Ellen Page deserves the kudos, but don't overlook Garner's poignant turn as a woman longing for a baby in this indie comedy.

7. THE WIRE: SEASONS 1–4 on DVD

With the final season of HBO's ambitious Baltimore saga premiering in January, now's the perfect time to catch up on one of TV's finest achievements.

8. ANTHOLOGY RECORDINGS

Looking for obscure tracks from Moondog or Daisy Chain? Skip the vintage record store: This site has rarities for downloading. *(anthologyrecordings.com)*

9. THE REAL HOUSEWIVES OF ORANGE COUNTY on Bravo

Season 3 of Lifestyles of the Rich and Ridiculous gets (nonsurgically) enhanced by Tamra, a hot new Realtor.

READER'S CHOICE

SEND YOUR PICKS TO **EW.COM**

10. 'RAZOR' on DVD

Battlestar Galactica's TV movie about the untold story of the *Pegasus* gets a new unrated, extended edition.

Submitted by Shelly Merlo

GARNER: KATHLEEN VOEGE/AP; *THE WIRE*: PAUL SCHIRALDI; *BATTLESTAR GALACTICA: RAZOR*: CAROLE SEGAL

Depp descends into shear madness

MOVIES

Blade of Glory

Johnny Depp and Tim Burton take a stab at Stephen Sondheim's gorgeously bloody musical.

BY LISA SCHWARZBAUM

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street
Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter
R, 120 mins. (DreamWorks)

A wronged barber in 19th-century London wielding silver razors on a mission of vengeance sings "They all deserve to die!" in the thrilling epiphany aria that's the first-act climax of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*. As any besotted devotee of Stephen Sondheim's 1979 musical-theater masterpiece knows, they all do. Die, I mean. Thwarted just when he has the throat of the villain he most wants in his hands—the evil Judge Turpin, who sent the then-named Benjamin Barker to prison years earlier on false charges—the brooding tonsorial artist expands his killing plans to include all who sit in his barber chair. The legend of this grim reaper and the widowed baker, Mrs. Nellie Lovett, who assisted him by grinding up dead customers

into meat pies has been around for over 150 years. But only Sondheim's music and lyrics could explain the barber's reasoning so eloquently: "The lives of the wicked should be made brief/For the rest of us death will be a relief."

In other words, to stage a proper *Sweeney Todd*, necks must be slit, human flesh must be squished into pastries, and blood ought to spurt in fountains and rivers of death. Enter Tim Burton, who has chopped and kneaded an almost dauntingly famous theater piece into something that stands up to the screen, and has tenderly art-directed soup-thick, tomato-red, fake-gore blood with the zest of a Hollywood-funded Jackson Pollock.

Burton's adaptation, starring Johnny Depp in the title role and Helena Bonham Carter as Mrs. Lovett, isn't the most enduringly classic *Sweeney Todd* (that would be the original Broadway production, with Len Cariou and Angela Lansbury) or the most brilliantly original (nothing beats the deconstructed 2005 stunner, with Michael Cerveris and Patti LuPone). Songs have been cut and characters reproportioned in importance (the utilitarian screenplay, respectful enough of Hugh Wheeler's original book, is by John Logan, who co-wrote *Gladiator*). But this opulent, attentive production is splashed with signature style and hell-bent on entertaining Sondheimites, Deppsters, ladies who heart Alan Rickman in the role of the judge, and even *Borat*/*Ali G*-loving strays who wander in to see an uncontainably antic Sacha Baron Cohen in the role of a blackmailing faux-Italian con man. It's an impossible assignment, really, carried off with more-than-respectable panache.

Indeed, the movie is so finely minced a mixture of Sondheim's original melodrama and Burton's signature spicing that it's difficult to think of any other filmmaker so naturally suited for the job. (Okay, I'd love to see what *American Psycho* director Mary Harron would have done, but I'm sure DreamWorks wouldn't.) What Burton lacks (and I suspect he knows he lacks) in ease when it comes to directing fully liberated glee, real fear, and dangerous hilarity, he steadfastly attempts to make up for with compensatory floods of visual verve. Plus, he gets Depp, Bonham Carter, Rickman, and even Baron Cohen to sing.

Oh, Captain Jack Sparrow, gone to the really, really dark side! Burton has an affinity for the mayhem's Grand Guignol setting, of course. But more valuably, he has a unique collaborative relationship with his longtime leading man. And painted in chalky pallor and drop-dead under-eye shadows out of the *Pirates of the Caribbean*–*Edward Scissorhands* makeup bag, Depp propels the production through sheer graceful grit of stardom. He emphasizes the mourning man's melancholy (he misses his lost wife and the daughter who's now the hideous judge's ward) with a cold *Sleepy Hollow* ghostliness, rather than

Fit to be pied: Bonham Carter

a hot, iniquities-of-the-world fury. Depp is a decent enough singer in a cast for whom vocal prowess isn't job No. 1 or even job No. 5, but singing almost doesn't matter, not while he's around: He's the most interesting person on the screen, and the demon barber he conjures is a fascinating interpretation.

As for Mrs. Lovett, she truly is a woman of "limited wind," as Sondheim describes her and Bonham Carter sings her in a thin, breathy voice—it's difficult to believe that this particular bloody wonder can lift a rolling pin, let alone crank the handle on her hellish meat-grinding machinery. It's nice, though, how Bonham Carter's corpse-bride complexion complements Depp's; how Rickman's sadistic Judge Turpin oozes real erotic heat, not just twisted sexual tastes; and how honorably a big studio has, er, stuck its neck out to do right by one of the great American artistic creations of our time. **B+**

Backstory

+ Johnny Depp—who famously channeled Keith Richards in the *Pirates of the Caribbean* trilogy—says his *Sweeney* singing style owes an unconscious debt to musicians like Elvis Costello, Iggy Pop, and David Bowie (above).

CRITICAL MASS

A sampling of critics from across the country grade 10 current releases.

	TY BURR *Boston Globe*	LISA KENNEDY *The Denver Post*	LIAM LACEY *Toronto Globe and Mail*	MICK LASALLE *San Francisco Chronicle*	JACK MATHEWS *N.Y. Daily News*	TODD McCARTHY *Variety*	CLAUDIA PUIG *USA Today*	CARRIE RICKEY *The Philadelphia Inquirer*	RENE RODRIGUEZ *The Miami Herald*	STEPHANIE ZACHAREK *Salon.com*	ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY	EW READERS*	CRITICS' AVERAGE
ATONEMENT	B+	A–	B+	A	B+	B+	B	A–	A	A	B	B+	A–
AUGUST RUSH	D	C–	—	—	—	—	B	C	C–	—	D+	B	C–
BEOWULF	B	—	C	C	B	C+	B	—	C+	D	B+	B	C+
THE DIVING BELL AND...	A	A	A–	A	B+	B–	B	—	B+	A	A–	B+	A–
ENCHANTED	B+	B	B	—	—	B+	B+	A–	B	—	B+	A–	B+
▲ FRED CLAUS	—	B+	—	D	D	D	C	C–	C	C–	C	C+	C–
THE GOLDEN COMPASS	B–	B	B+	C+	A–	C+	C+	B	C	D+	C	B	B–
GRACE IS GONE	B	B	B–	B	—	C	B+	—	—	—	C	B–	B–
JUNO	B+	A	A	C+	A–	B+	A–	A–	—	A–	A–	A–	A–
THE SAVAGES	B+	A–	B–	B+	B+	B	A	A	B+	—	A	B+	A–

*EW READER GRADES come from the Front Row, EW's online reader panel. If you'd like to join, go to frontrowpanel.com/join.

(OPPOSITE PAGE) LEAH GALLO; (THIS PAGE) *SWEENEY TODD*: PETER MOUNTAIN; BOWIE: PETER MAZEL/SUNSHINE/RETNA UK; *FRED CLAUS*: JAAP BUITENDIJK

Everyone's a Critic

'RUSH' TO JUDGMENT

DEAR LISA, How could you! Sure, *August Rush* [above] is overly sentimental. In fact, it practically slaps you in the face! And Robin Williams is terribly miscast [in the Fagin role]. But I'm a devoted moviegoer who sees at least 50 new films a year, and this is the first film that has brought absolute tears of joy to my eyes since *Life Is Beautiful*. Cut it some slack, will you? We need to feel this kind of rush every once in a while, to endure the morbidity of today's films. —*Dave Wynn, Tarkio, Mo.*

DEAR DAVE, I agree with your wise observation: *August Rush* really does slap you in the face with oversentimentality. In fact, it practically grabs you by the cheeks and pinches you with its contrived cuteness until you're left with bruises! (*Life Is Beautiful*, on the other hand, merely tickles you with clowns until you've forgotten the Holocaust.) As grateful as I am for any sensation of moviegoing joy (especially, you're right, in this time of the cinematically dark and grim), I can't swallow artificial sweetener fed to me as pure maple syrup. —*Lisa*

Covert ops suit Hanks and Hoffman

Good Time 'Charlie'

A colorful Texas congressman's clandestine wheeling-and-dealing makes for a playful look at global politics. **BY OWEN GLEIBERMAN**

Charlie Wilson's War
Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, R, 96 mins. (Universal)

Charlie Wilson's War, adapted by director Mike Nichols and screenwriter Aaron Sorkin from George Crile's nonfiction best-seller, has a familiar design—it's all about a likable scoundrel who discovers what it means to act out of conviction. The film's underlying twist, though, is tartly ironic. Even as we're cheering on Charlie Wilson (Tom Hanks), a back-scratching, log-rolling, good-ol'-boy Texas congressman of the 1980s who stumbles onto the cause of his career when he decides to covertly fund Afghanistan's mujahideen rebels against the Soviet Union, it's never clear if Wilson's "commitment" is anything but a more elevated, and naive, form of hubris.

When we first meet Charlie, he's sitting in a Las Vegas hot tub, surrounded by drugs and *Playboy* bimbos. Middle-aged and single, a happy alcoholic who can make a Scotch in the morning look like the height of civility, Charlie adores the perks of power and knows how to hold on to them. Hanks, who has been repressing the sleaze he showed in early roles for too long, bites into Charlie's buttery corruption, and Nichols and Sorkin turn the wonkish jargon of politics into light comedy by staying absolutely true to it. There's so much lying going on that each time someone actually comes out with something he believes, it's like the jabbiest of punchlines.

Charlie's awakening is spurred by his alliance with Joanne Herring (Julia Roberts, game if a bit waxy), a wealthy born-again right-wing Houston socialite he occasionally sleeps with. Joanne, more clued in to world affairs than Charlie, wants the U.S. to provide heavy-duty weaponry for the Afghanistan war, which is already turning into the Soviets' Vietnam. Charlie is a Southern Cold War hawk himself (he sits on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee), and once he visits an Afghan refugee camp and meets children with their limbs blown off, he has all the motivation he needs. But any overt involvement would play into Soviet propaganda. To facilitate his covert arms plan, Wilson teams up with a slovenly CIA bureaucrat, Gust Avrakotos (Philip Seymour Hoffman), whose desire to spur U.S. action is comically inseparable from the resentment he feels at a life of third-rate espionage gigs. (No one does petty cubicle rage like Hoffman.) The two forge a passel of strange bedfellows, uniting an Israeli arms dealer with the leader of Pakistan.

Charlie Wilson's War is a journalistic satire of realpolitik in which our jerry-rigged alliances, which looked strategic at the time, end up biting the U.S. in unforeseen ways. Hovering over the film is the audience's realization that the Afghan war, while it hastened the downfall of the Soviet Union, created the breeding ground for an arguably more toxic threat: the jihad radicals who had nothing but hatred for the West (even as they were only too happy to use its rocket launchers). Instead of running with that irony, though, the movie grows pious about it. The unconvincingly abrupt finale snuffs ambiguity. It says Charlie was right to fight his war—if only Congress had had the will to support his reconstruction dream! All of which sounds a little too close to recently made rationalizations for a certain other war. **B+**

AUGUST RUSH: ABBOT GENSER. CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR: FRANCOIS DUHAMEL

Dog days: Smith and canine friend

Solitary Man

As a postapocalyptic survivor navigating New York's empty streets, Will Smith carries this dated yet diverting sci-fi thriller.

BY OWEN GLEIBERMAN

I Am Legend
Will Smith, Alice Braga
PG-13, 100 mins. (Warner Bros.)

In *I Am Legend*, Will Smith, as a U.S. Army officer who may be the last man on earth, drives at top speeds through the concrete valleys of Manhattan, which have been deserted for so long that the cracks in the roads now sprout scruffy green weeds. For sheer eeriness, that effect—the metropolis as vacant lot—far outdoes the desolate Times Square of *Vanilla Sky*, and Smith is the perfect actor (maybe almost too perfect) to play a survivor who has no one to talk to but his dog and himself. Smith has always worn his self-sufficiency like a suit of armor, often treating costars as sounding boards; he brings that jaunty insularity to the abandoned canyons of a trashed *Twilight Zone* New York. Here, though, he also draws on the vulnerability he showed last year in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, suggesting a man whose sanity is beginning to fray.

Based on Richard Matheson's 1954 novel, *I Am Legend* is a spooky-hokey postapocalyptic thriller built around our fear of contagion (the premise is that a "miracle" cancer cure has wiped out the earth's population). It's a movie that might have fit snugly into the zeitgeist had it been made in the early '90s, or maybe 1971—when, in fact, it was made as *The Omega Man*, a somber but colossally silly Charlton Heston thriller. Let's be honest: The peril of infectious disease, while quite real, is hardly the anxiety of the moment. In spirit, *I Am Legend* is caught in some abstractly doom-laden sci-fi past. For what it is, though, the film is well-done, a case of suspenseful competence trumping questionable relevance.

There's one scary sequence in which Smith follows his dog into a warehouse, but as soon as you see the prancing, gnashing, veiny mutant humanoids who have taken up refuge there, you think, "Okay, it's a fake-demon CGI movie." And so it is, though at least it never becomes a soulless monster-hunt videogame like *Resident Evil*. Smith, who keeps the movie grounded, isn't just surviving—he's on a mission. In *The Omega Man*, Heston faced a cult of white-faced hippie mutants in sunglasses and medieval monks' robes. Sometimes, CGI really is an advance. **B**

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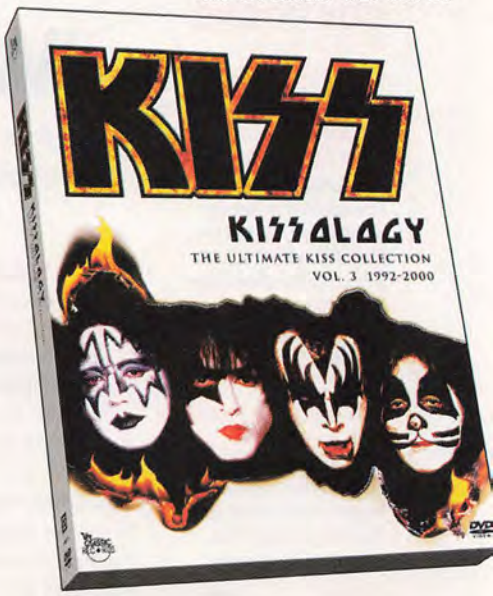

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Soar Subject

An Afghan immigrant returns home to make amends for his past.

BY LISA SCHWARZBAUM

The Kite Runner
Zekiria Ebrahimi, Ahmad Khan Mahmoodzada
PG-13, 128 mins.
(Paramount Classics)

Few Americans will recognize any of the actors in *The Kite Runner*, and anyone unfamiliar with the Dari language must lean on subtitles. That's not a bad thing. "Foreignness" is the great leveler in this pretty good adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's pretty good 2003 best-seller. Here's a case where those who have read the book and those who haven't are on the same playing field—the same kite-flying field.

As in *Atonement*, the themes are a writer's education and a guilt-edged destiny shaped by a childhood act of betrayal. This time, the youthful offender is Amir (Zekiria Ebrahimi), a privileged Kabul kid. Back in the days before the oppressive Soviets invaded Afghanistan and the repressive Taliban followed, Amir abandoned his boyhood servant and pal, Hassan (Ahmad Khan Mahmoodzada), in Hassan's moment of terrible brutalization; soon after, Amir and his father emigrated to America. So adult repentance involves a return to a homeland in ruin—and, at one point, a violent showdown with a mad mullah.

It's a big saga—and not all of the book fits on the screen. (How could it?) But the challenge invigorates Marc Forster (*Monster's Ball, Finding Neverland*), a filmmaker who in the past has approached his material like he's examining a specimen from another planet. (The streamlined script is by David Benioff.) In making a movie about the hot mess of Afghan history, a sense of reserve turns out to be a useful tool for peace. **B**

Fly guys: Mahmoodzada and Ebrahimi

"'Foreignness' is the great leveler in this pretty good adaptation of Khaled Hosseini's pretty good 2003 best-seller."

COX ROCKS

A few of the best lines from *Walk Hard*'s soundtrack.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT
"To conclude, Mr. President/I'm not at all hesitant/To tell you I think the First Lady's a fox/Her husband, the jerk-off, has ruined my country/That's all for today/Sincerely, D. Cox."

LET ME HOLD YOU (LITTLE MAN)
"All the elevator buttons/So incredibly high/I stand today for the midget/Half the size of a regular guy."

ROYAL JELLY
"Mailboxes drip like lampposts in the twisted birth canal of the Colosseum."

'Walk' & Roll

Judd Apatow and company turn in a clever biopic about a fake superstar.

BY OWEN GLEIBERMAN

Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story
John C. Reilly, Jenna Fischer
R, 98 mins.
(Columbia)

Walk Hard, a parody of warts-and-all pop-star biopics, comes out of the Judd Apatow factory (he produced and co-wrote it), and at first it appears to be nothing more or less than this year's model of *Epic Movie*, *Not Another Teen Movie*, and all those other happy-idiot genre spoofs that descend from the *Airplane!* school of artfully hyperbolic razzing. Directed by Jake Kasdan, the movie tells the story of Dewey Cox (John C. Reilly), a doltish country-rocker who becomes a star, meets a stage partner (sparkly Jenna Fischer) as prudish as a nun, and enjoys a rise to legend status matched only by his druggy, *Daddy didn't love me!* fall. A handful of the jokes score (the boy Dewey slicing his brother in half, which inspires his dad's refrain of "The wrong kid died!"), a few fall flat (a not-dirty-enough tweak of dirty dancing), and most are mildly clever enough to keep you grinning.

Reilly hears a Who

The movie walks the line of surreal vulgarity (you will not, repeat *not*, expect the penis), yet most of it, intentionally, is less nutzoid than your average megaplex genre parody. It's a teensy bit *straighter*, and that's a good thing, since it allows Kasdan to take on not just the clichés of the biopic but the emotions as well. He skewers the spirit of rock history. As Dewey moves into the hippie '60s, then the variety-show '70s, Reilly lends his weariness a goofy heart. *Walk Hard* isn't merciless (except for maybe one wicked sequence with the Beatles), and that's because it so loves what it's sending up: the pleasure, ego, and sheer exhaustion of what happens behind the music. **B**

THE KITE RUNNER: PHIL BRAY; WALK HARD: THE DEWEY COX STORY (2): GEMMA LA MANA

The Perfect Holiday

Morris Chestnut, Queen Latifah, Gabrielle Union
PG, 96 mins. (Yari)

Benjamin (Morris Chestnut) is a struggling songwriter and part-time mall Santa; Nancy (the ever-winning Gabrielle Union) is a divorcée whose daughter asks Santa to bring Mom a man. Will they find love for Christmas? Well, duh. So why throw in a bizarre device involving Queen Latifah as a narrating angel and a creepy, sallow Terrence Howard as her adversary? Their A-list names may be a draw, but it's too bad no one thought the endearing performances in this charming (if cliché) family romance would be enough. **B–** *—Whitney Pastorek*

P.S. I Love You

Hilary Swank, Gerard Butler, Lisa Kudrow
PG-13, 126 mins. (Warner Bros.)

I know you're supposed to just go with the premise of this chick pap: Hunky Irish guy (*300*'s Gerard Butler, dining in hell) dies from a brain tumor that never affected his good looks, but not before leaving love letters to cheer his shoe-collecting wife (Hilary Swank) in her first year of widowhood. FYI, there's zero chemistry between the two commodified headliners. P.S.: The plus in the harsh grade goes solely to the divine Lisa Kudrow, delivering desperately needed laughs as the twitchy widow's husband-hunting best friend. **D+** *—LS*

Youth Without Youth

Tim Roth, Bruno Ganz
R, 125 mins. (Sony Pictures Classics)

After 10 years, Francis Ford Coppola has returned. The real question is whether what he's come back to is filmmaking. In this patchy and ponderous mystico-historical disaster, Tim Roth plays an old professor who regresses to his hardy adulthood after being struck by lightning. He's doing "research" on the origins of language, but who cares when Coppola, lurching through the post-war Romanian settings, has forgotten the language of storytelling? The movie is one soporific, depressed, deadeningly vague scene after another. **F** *—OG*

The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep

Alex Etel, Emily Watson, Ben Chaplin
PG, 105 mins. (Columbia)

Parents can trust that none of their wee ones will ask for a stuffed water horse for Christmas. The star of this Scottish fable, about the mythical Loch Ness monster, looks like a raw chicken breast with teeth when he hatches. The boy who raises him (*Millions*' Alex Etel, from the Freddie Highmore school of cute) is nice and freckled, and the chirping creature helps him mourn his WWII missing-in-action father. But the pet grows into one angry growler; if he doesn't scare the kids, the adults chasing him will. **C–** *—Karen Valby*

P.S. I LOVE YOU: NORMAN JEAN ROY; YOUTH WITHOUT YOUTH: COS AELENEI; THE WATER HORSE: LEGEND OF THE DEEP: SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT

THE CHART

BOX OFFICE

1 THE GOLDEN COMPASS

Despite a story line with echoes of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, this $180 million fantasy epic didn't generate much magic during a slow weekend at the box office.

THE TOP 20

		WEEKEND GROSS*	NUMBER OF SITES †	WEEKEND PER SITE AVERAGE	PERCENTAGE CHANGE	WEEKS IN RELEASE	GROSS TO DATE
1	THE GOLDEN COMPASS	$25.8	3,528	$7,308	—	1	$25.8
2	ENCHANTED	$10.7	3,520	$3,042	–35	3	$83.9
3	THIS CHRISTMAS	$5.0	1,879	$2,640	–38	3	$42.7
4	FRED CLAUS *After an underwhelming third-place bow last month, Vince Vaughn's irreverent yuletide comedy is still in the top 10—and Christmas is yet to come.*	$4.6	3,185	$1,447	–16	5	$65.5
5	BEOWULF	$4.5	2,976	$1,524	–45	4	$76.1
6	NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN	$4.1	1,324	$3,109	–6	5	$28.7
7	AUGUST RUSH	$3.5	2,310	$1,520	–30	3	$25.1
8	HITMAN	$3.5	2,418	$1,443	–42	3	$35.8
9	AWAKE	$3.3	2,023	$1,645	–43	2	$10.7
10	THE MIST	$2.6	2,336	$1,126	–42	3	$23.5
11	BEE MOVIE	$2.6	2,707	$963	–41	6	$121.0
12	AMERICAN GANGSTER	$2.5	2,132	$1,191	–40	6	$125.6
13	MR. MAGORIUM'S WONDER...	$2.0	2,341	$843	–39	4	$29.0
14	DAN IN REAL LIFE	$1.1	1,251	$849	–36	7	$45.9
15	ATONEMENT *Keira Knightley reteamed with 'Pride & Prejudice' director Joe Wright to bring Ian McEwan's award-winning 2002 novel to the big screen. The romantic drama, which costars James McAvoy ('Becoming Jane'), has already grossed more than $30 million overseas.*	$0.8	32	$24,901	—	1	$0.8
16	BEFORE THE DEVIL KNOWS...	$0.6	321	$1,802	–25	7	$5.3
17	JUNO *It hasn't even made its first million, but this whip-smart teen comedy, starring Ellen Page ('Hard Candy') and Jason Bateman ('Arrested Development'), has already earned big awards-season buzz—and one of the year's best per-theater averages.*	$0.4	7	$59,124	—	1	$0.5
18	I'M NOT THERE	$0.3	148	$2,353	–30	3	$2.2
19	INTO THE WILD	$0.3	360	$920	–27	12	$16.2
20	BELLA	$0.3	402	$685	–35	7	$7.2

SOURCE: NIELSEN EDI. WEEKEND OF DEC. 7–9 *WEEKEND-GROSS AND GROSS-TO-DATE FIGURES IN MILLIONS
†INCLUDES SOME MULTISCREEN THEATERS AND PRINTS SHIPPED AS WELL AS INDIVIDUAL SCREENS

Two-Part Harmony

A pair of lost souls find each other through song in the offbeat musical romance *Once*.

BY KEN TUCKER

The hills are alive: Irglová and Hansard

Once
Glen Hansard, Markéta Irglová
R, 86 mins., 2007

Once is a perfect movie to discover on DVD. Trust me: You'll fall hard for this love story about a Dublin street musician (Hansard) and a Czech immigrant (Irglová) and the romance they discover not only between themselves but in the music they create. A "small film" in the sense that it's a low-budget Irish indie movie that never got megaplex distribution, *Once* is also one of the most bighearted movies of the year.

Hansard—in real life the leader of the rock band the Frames—plays a fellow who works in his father's vacuum-repair shop when he's not strumming his guitar for passersby and pub change. He chances to meet Irglová (neither character is given a name), a classically trained pianist without a piano. She lives in a cramped apartment with her small daughter and her mother.

At first, *Once*'s shot-on-the-fly casualness makes it seem halting and amateurish (it was written and directed by John Carney, himself formerly a member of the Frames). But then, early on, there's a scene in a music store, in which the girl sits at a showroom piano to play a bit of Mendelssohn and the guy starts teaching her one of his songs, singing in a plaintive tenor, soon followed by their tentative getting-to-know-each-other harmonies. And with that, *Once* takes off—and gives you goose bumps. The tune builds into a lovely, swirling ballad, and you know these two were meant for each other. (For essentially untrained actors, Hansard and Irglová are subtly expressive.) In keeping with that notion, the movie itself develops a lyric rhythm. If *Once* captures the magic of small-time music-making, it's also realistic enough to depict hardscrabble lives and difficult situations that strain the couple's relationship.

There's a brief making-of, but the best extra is an engaging feature commentary with Hansard, Irglová, and Carney. *Once* was shot in a mere 17 days, and Carney calls the result "an unself-conscious musical," referring to the way the characters don't burst into fully formed compositions whose lyrics further the plot, but rather perform songs dictated by the few simple plot points in the movie.

There's a marvelous section, for example, in which the duo and a few of his musician friends rent studio time to record a demo. It could have been trite, but the long scene—edited with quick, crisp cuts—captures the exhausting exhilaration of working till dawn to get a sound down on tape just so. With a similar avid precision, *Once* tells a sweet love story with tender passion and not a wisp of sentimentality. **A–**

EW PICK

Backstory

+ Bob Dylan (above) liked *Once* so much that he asked the Frames to open for him on a leg of his recent tour; Hansard and Irglová also covered Dylan's "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" for the soundtrack to Todd Haynes' Dylan biopic *I'm Not There*.

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Android Rage

It's back to the future (again) with a cutting-edge *Blade Runner* set.

BY DALTON ROSS

Ford as robotic Rick Deckard

Blade Runner: Ultimate Collector's Edition
Harrison Ford
R, 117 mins., 1982

Yes, Rick Deckard is a replicant. *Blade Runner* director Ridley Scott finally ends the speculation over his android-hunting cop. "If you don't get it, you're a moron," he says in a new DVD extra. Whether you "get it" may depend on which version of the 1982 futuristic noir you choose. There are *five* of them in this five-disc, briefcase-packaged Ultimate Collector's Edition (take that, George Lucas!). While the latest "Final Cut" version is not dramatically different from the 1992 Director's Cut, it does correct several technical flaws, including continuity-defying scars, stunt doubles with bad wigs, and Roy Batty's dove flying off into an inexplicably blue sky. The exhaustive documentary extras—almost *eight hours'* worth—also set the record straight on a few counts, like the expository narration for dummies and the original's happy-smiley ending, rumored to have been inserted by financial backers against Scott's will. Not so, says the director: "It was *our* idea. I am not stupid—I looked at [test-screening] results and said, 'This ain't working.'" (Ford, for his part, hated the voice-over. You can even hear him complaining about it on unused session tapes.) So is the UCE an exercise in overkill? (There are two- and four-disc Final Cut editions as well.) Not really, considering how dramatically *Blade* changed the entire look and feel of sci-fi with its wet, smoky, dystopian vision of the future. And if, after sitting through it all, you still don't "get it," unlike Mr. Scott I won't call you names. **A**

EW PICK

The DVD "does correct several technical flaws, including continuity-defying scars and stunt doubles with bad wigs."

A 'Bring It On' Boxed Set? Awesome, Oh Wow!

After 'Bring It On' got fans fired up, Universal showed its spirit with three direct-to-DVD sequels. Now, they all team up in 'Bring It On: The Cheerbook Collection.' On a scale of one to four megaphones, which pic has the most pep? —Tanner Stransky

Bring It On (2000)

Cheer-tastrophe Clovers captain Isis (Gabrielle Union) challenges Toros leader Torrance (Kirsten Dunst) to "bring it" after learning that the Toros cribbed the Clovers' sassed-out chants. **Choice Quip** "She puts the *itch* in *bitch*." **Judge's Ruling** No surprise, the sound-bite-heavy script—which made *BIO* an official member of the teen-movie canon—stomps the sequels.

Bring It On Again (2004)

Cheer-tastrophe Fed up with diva leader Tina (Bree Turner), new recruit Whittier (Anne Judson-Yager) forms her own squad of misfits. **It's the Original Meets...** *Revenge of the Nerds*. **Choice Quip** "Don't be all up in my Kool-Aid!" **Judge's Ruling** While Turner's maniacal head bitch is high-flying, the flick as a whole takes a tumble.

Bring It On: All or Nothing (2006)

Cheer-tastrophe Pert Britney (Hayden Panettiere) crosses viper Camille (Solange Knowles) while trying out for a Rihanna video. **It's the Original Meets...** *Save the Last Dance*. **Choice Quip** "If we're speaking in IM, you're more like a BFH: Bitch From Hell." **Judge's Ruling** Seeing a pre-*Heroes* Panettiere is a kick, but the conflict's contrived.

Bring It On: In It to Win It (2007)

Cheer-tastrophe The East Coast Jets take on the West Coast Sharks (tacky!) at summer camp. The claws come out when they morph into a mega-squad. **It's the Original Meets...** *West Side Story*, duh. **Choice Quip** "I'm not mad.... I My-Spaced it all out of my system." **Judge's Ruling** We've seen this routine one too many times.

BLADE RUNNER: EVERETT COLLECTION; BRING IT ON: ALL OR NOTHING: JOHN DUNSON

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Catch the holiday spirit with ABC Family! **25 Days of Christmas** (Dec. 1–25) features new original movies such as *Holiday in Handcuffs* and *Snowglobe* as well as holiday favorites like *Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town, The Polar Express* and *Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas.* Watch 25 Days of Christmas all month long, only on ABC Family.

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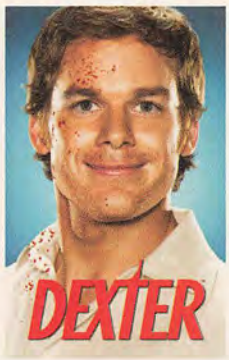

The Entertainment Weekly Lounge bounded into Beantown on November 1 at premier nightspot Revolution Rock Bar. Sponsors **Yellow Tail wine**, **Bacardi Limón**, **Intel**, **Propel Fitness Water**, **Aquage**, and **TV Land** were on hand to treat Bostonians to the best of each brand. EW's guests were also treated to a special acoustic performance by Internet sensation **Marié Digby**. The next EW Lounge hits Atlanta on February 28.

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Stardust

Claire Danes, Michelle Pfeiffer, Robert De Niro
PG-13, 127 mins., 2007

Director Matthew Vaughn (*Layer Cake*) describes his initial concept for this lighthearted fantasy—about a man (Charlie Cox) who falls in love with a shooting star (Danes)—as "*Princess Bride* meets *Midnight Run*." *Stardust* isn't as original as either, and at two hours plus, it drags, especially when De Niro arrives as an unaccountably fey pirate. But it has its charms, like Pfeiffer's spirited turn as an evil witch. **EXTRAS** In a making-of, *Stardust* author Neil Gaiman says he felt guilty the production had to build the flying pirate ship he'd only imagined for the novel. **B** —*Kerrie Mitchell*

High School Musical 2

Zac Efron, Vanessa Hudgens, Ashley Tisdale
G, 111 mins., 2007

In this sequel to the Disney Channel smash, the gang goes on summer vacay, but there's no rest for Sharpay (Tisdale). She's trying to steal basketball star Troy (Efron) from brainy Gabriella (Hudgens)...and ends up stealing the movie. From the moment she shows up in her hot-pink convertible to her talent-show fiasco, Tisdale's timing—as a comedian and a hoofer—is fabulous. But don't cry for Troy and Gabriella: At least they *finally* get to kiss. **EXTRAS** Fans can obsess over all those incredible dance scenes via a rehearsal cam. **B** —*Eileen Clarke*

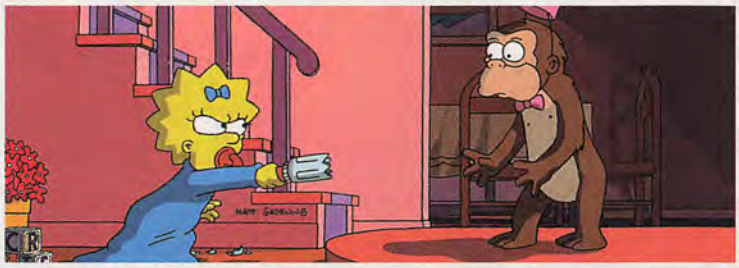
December Boys

Daniel Radcliffe, Lee Cormie
PG-13, 105 mins., 2007

This '60s-set Aussie yarn probably wouldn't have found U.S. distribution but for the presence of Harry Potter. As the oldest of four orphans (all born in December) on holiday with a benevolent old man by the sea, Radcliffe plays a moody adolescent hoping to be adopted and ready for some under-the-bra adventures. The boys' sentimental journey leads to an inevitable riptide—literal and figurative—that tears them apart before bonding them back together. **EXTRAS** Deleted scenes might have made some details (like prospective parents' marital woes) more clear. **B–** —*Ari Karpel*

Five Things We Learned From...

'THE SIMPSONS MOVIE'



The essential real-world knowledge lost from my brain (anniversaries, co-workers' names, the lyrics to "MMMBop") to make room for 20 years of Springfield minutiae is regrettable—but necessary. Now that *The Simpsons Movie* is on DVD, we're cramming in five more Comic-Book-Guy-caliber nuggets. —*Jeff Labrecque*

1 Two commentaries dwell mostly on the film that *wasn't* made, a coarser incarnation that included history's longest poop joke.
2 The filmmakers chose broad comedy over the show's more cerebral, satirical sensibilities: "We really wanted to write this movie for people who weren't that familiar with *The Simpsons*," says co-writer Al Jean.
3 Jean's offhand remark about an amazing "spider-pig" launched his co-writers into a silly *Spider-Man* musical parody that became the film's hilarious trademark tune.
4 Why did the Simpson family take that detour to Alaska? Homer insisted because he always wanted to visit the city of Homer—a detail lost in 100 script revisions.
5 A deleted scene reveals that villain Russ Cargill originally resembled Springfield sad sack Gil. His character was redrawn, though, leaving promo partner Burger King with 150,000 useless Cargill toys, according to producer James L. Brooks.

THE CHART

DVD SALES

1 SHREK THE THIRD

The dancing green ogre has all the right moves: DreamWorks' animated film rules the kingdom in its third week of release.

TOP 20		LAST WEEK	BOX OFFICE GROSS TO DATE*	WEEKS IN RELEASE	EW GRADE
1	SHREK THE THIRD	2	$321.0	3	C+
2	LIVE FREE OR DIE HARD *In a DVD special feature, Justin Long—who plays Bruce Willis' computer-hacking sidekick—says he thought his agent was joking when he offered Long the script. It's the actor's first big-budget action flick.*	1	$134.5	2	B
3	THE SANTA CLAUSE 3...	3	$84.5	2	C†
4	RATATOUILLE	5	$206.1	4	A
5	HAIRSPRAY *John Travolta's cross-dressing turn as plus-size laundress Edna Turnblad in this John Waters adaptation required him to sit through four hours of makeup and fat-suit-fitting.*	4	$118.8	2	B+
6	THE ORIGINAL CHRISTMAS...	10	–	13	–
7	BRATZ	–	$10.0	1	C–†
8	TRANSFORMERS	7	$319.1	7	B+
9	MR. BEAN'S HOLIDAY	–	$32.9	1	B†
10	SPIDER-MAN 3	8	$336.5	5	C+
11	WAITRESS *The late director Adrienne Shelly wrote the script—about a pregnant waitress and her gift for baking scrumptious pies—while she herself was expecting; Shelly's child Sophie appeared on screen as Lulu, the toddler daughter of Keri Russell's character Jenna.*	–	$19.0	1	B
12	HOT ROD	–	$13.9	1	C+†
13	OCEAN'S THIRTEEN	6	$117.2	3	B
14	I NOW PRONOUNCE YOU...	14	$120.0	4	F
15	RETURN TO NEVER LAND...	–	$48.4	1	C+†
16	MEET THE ROBINSONS	12	$97.8	6	C†
17	I KNOW WHO KILLED ME	–	$7.4	1	F†
18	FUTURAMA: BENDER'S BIG...	–	–	1	–
19	SKINWALKERS	–	$1.0	1	–
20	A CHRISTMAS STORY	41	$19.2	5	A–

SOURCES: RENTRAK'S RETAIL ESSENTIALS FOR THE WEEK ENDING DEC. 1, 2007; NIELSEN EDI *IN MILLIONS
† ORIGINAL THEATRICAL GRADE

STARDUST: DAVID JAMES. HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 2: ADAM LARKEY. DECEMBER BOYS: LISA TOMASETTI. THE SIMPSONS MOVIE: MATT GROENING. THE SIMPSONS TM & © 2007 20TH CENTURY FOX FILM CORPORATION. SHREK THE THIRD: DREAMWORKS ANIMATION SKG

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Lost's Henry Ian Cusick and Monaghan drown in critical praise

Top 10 Episodes

Ten EW writers pick their favorite television episodes of the year, and explain why these installments were simply a cut above the rest

LOST "Through the Looking Glass," May 23 (ABC) After strange, mystical forces (read: critics and fans) aligned against *Lost* early in season 3, how did ABC's trippiest drama fight back? With a gasp-inducing finale that packed a wallop of love, death, and war, including the heartbreakingly redemptive drowning of Charlie (Dominic Monaghan), and the castaways marching closer to rescue (or doom?). And the final revelation that Jack's (Matthew Fox) down-and-out flashback scenes were actually a flash-*forward*—he and Kate (Evangeline Lilly) have gotten off the island, but he desperately wants to return—tickled, tangled, and tantalized our minds all at once. —*Dan Snierson*

THE SOPRANOS "The Second Coming," May 20 (HBO) Darkness closed in around Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) during the final season. In fact, the end turned out to be pitch-black and arrived so suddenly that for weeks afterward we stumbled to make sense of what we had seen. (Or hadn't.) But the climactic wail about the bonds and agonies between fathers and sons—one of this great series' greatest themes—was sounded two weeks before the abrupt conclusion: When AJ (Robert Iler) tried to commit suicide, Tony understood, maybe for the first time, his place in his own literally damned universe. —*Lisa Schwarzbaum*

HOUSE "Airborne," April 10 (Fox) Maybe *House* got a bit repetitious this year (hey, remember the episode when Hugh Laurie made the lifesaving diagnosis at the last minute?), but it still dispensed some of the most subversive humor on the air. And it got even better when the show broke out of form, with the cranky doc making a House call on a flight from Singapore, prepping for surgery with just three plastic spoons and alcohol wipes. House came up with a lifesaving diagnosis at the last minute...and yet it all felt brand-new. —*Benjamin Svetkey*

THE AMAZING RACE "I've Become the Archie Bunker of the Home," Nov. 11 (CBS) With its manically micromanaging dad and randy grandpa, this fall's *TAR* made all of my crackpot-reality-TV-casting fantasies come true. And by only the

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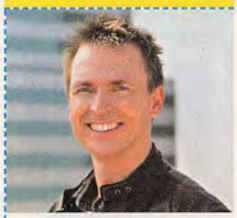


+ Relive the best moments from *The Amazing Race* (with host Phil Keoghan, above) and other shows in a gallery celebrating the finest EW.com TV Watches of 2007. Available at *ew.com/2007tv*.

LOST: MARIO PEREZ; *THE SOPRANOS*: CRAIG BLANKENHORN; *HOUSE*: ISABELLA VOSMIKOVA; *THE AMAZING RACE*: ROBERT VOETS

EW.COM POLL

Who was your favorite *Survivor* winner?

32% *Yul Kwon*
18% *Ethan Zohn*
15% *Richard Hatch*
15% *Tom Westman*
11% *Jenna Morasca*
9% *Tina Wesson*

READER RESPONSE

"I'm glad to see that Yul is leading the pack. He definitely deserves it. He was probably the best strategic player ever to play *Survivor*."

"I'd have to say Tina; she is so underrated but was a true master at the game."

"Where are the rest? Chris and Danni, both in their respective games, came back and won despite being the only member of their tribe left."

NEXT WEEK: CBS says that if the strike continues, it may start airing an edited version of *Dexter*, above. What other Showtime series would you like to see on CBS: *Weeds*, *Brotherhood*, *The Tudors*, or *Californication*? To vote, go to *ew.com/tvpoll*.

second episode, both men were—delightfully—in full crazy. Dad Ronald browbeat his superhumanly patient daughter with such nuggets as "I'm optimistic with the real truth flavor!" And it all ended with Gramps Donald, stripped to his briefs, unsuccessfully and filthily trying to pole-vault over a mud pit. It's just the way I want to see the world: through the eyes of a dirty old man. —*Josh Wolk*

30 ROCK "Rosemary's Baby," Oct. 25 (NBC) The first stroke of brilliance was having Carrie Fisher show up as Liz's (Tina Fey) heroine, a deeply political, slightly mad comedy writer. The second was putting Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin) into daddy-issued Tracy Jordan's (Tracy Morgan) counseling session, where Jack role-played Tracy's entire African-American family. Jack simpered and mugged with such *Good Times*-inspired, white-man-cliché zeal that the whole comedic freight train threatened to go off the rails, but instead just left me delightfully rattled. —*Gillian Flynn*

BIG LOVE "Kingdom Come," July 30 (HBO) To appreciate *Big Love*, you have to look past its odd conceit—polygamists in suburbia—and marvel at the well-plotted domestic drama at its center. "Kingdom Come" was the apex of a richer, more compelling season 2: Just as Bill (Bill Paxton) requested a seventh day of rest from his three incredulous wives, and sternly mentored his sexually active son Benny (Douglas Smith), he turned right around and amped up his dangerous feud with the creepy Green clan. Their payback—gunning down his father-in-law, Roman Grant (Harry Dean Stanton)—was, like the series itself, both shocking and satisfying. —*Nicholas Fonseca*

DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES "If There's Anything I Can't Stand," Oct. 21 (ABC) In this standout episode, everyone on Wisteria Lane was downright crabby: Bree (Marcia Cross) got an unwelcome shower for her faux baby. The new couple on the block, Bob (Tuc Watkins) and Lee (Kevin Rahm), met Susan (Teri Hatcher), who was not exactly a one-woman gay pride parade. And Edie (Nicollette Sheridan) contracted the STD named for a crustacean. The action culminated with one of the most brilliant sight gags of the year: As a waiter passed crab cakes, Edie slowly realized that her boyfriend, Carlos (Ricardo Antonio Chavira), had been sleeping with his ex-wife, Gaby (Eva Longoria Parker). And the only thing that *wasn't* itching was our remote control trigger finger. —*Henry Goldblatt*

Burn Notice's Donovan

BURN NOTICE "Old Friends," July 19 (USA) I knew I was in love with this insolent cable drama when ex-spy Michael Westen (Jeffrey Donovan) saw a guy preparing to attack him in a restaurant, slipped a cheap knife off the bar, bent it around his fist to form impromptu brass knuckles, then let the guy have it right in the kisser. Later in the episode, he showed me how to rig my front door so a shotgun will go off if someone opens it. This installment reminded me what the phrase "pushing daisies" really means. —*Ken Tucker*

FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS "Black Eyes and Broken Hearts," Feb. 14 (NBC) In dealing with the aftermath of a coach's racist remarks about the differences between black and white football players, *FNL* could have patronized us with lessons. Instead, we got Coach Taylor's (Kyle Chandler) bullheaded struggle to decide what's right; newly empowered running back Smash (Gaius Charles) coldly breaking his boycott to lead the black players onto the team bus; the barbed-wire tension of the team's on-field confrontation with true racism; that night's frightening standoff and its unexpected hero. Subtle yet powerfully real, this ep anchored a transcendent first season. —*Whitney Pastorek*

HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER "Slapsgiving," Nov. 19 (CBS) First, there's the trademark inside-joke lingo of the episode title, a reference to a "slap bet" that awarded Marshall the chance to beat on Barney at the gang's first Thanksgiving dinner together. Then there's the deadpan casting of the 79-year-old Orson Bean as Robin's 41-year-old boyfriend. Add in Ted and Robin's post-breakup hookup (and subsequent heartbreaking conversation), as well as a closing sing-along, and you've got a made-up holiday celebration that rivals any Chrismukkah or Festivus. —*Jennifer Armstrong*

30 ROCK: ANNE JOYCE; *DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES*: DANNY FELD; *BURN NOTICE*: GLENN WATSON; *FRIDAY NIGHT LIGHTS*: VAN REDIN; KWON: BILL INOSHITA; *DEXTER*: PETER IOVINO

Doggy Day Care

These days, Snoop Dogg is high on parenting (well, perhaps among other things). Here, a few daddy do's and don'ts from his new E! reality series, 'Father Hood' (Sundays at 10:30 p.m.). —Tim Stack

COMPROMISE When his thumping music interrupts his daughter's homework concentration, Snoop turns it down, realizing the importance of her studies. Everybody wins: Staring blankly into space is even better in stone (stoned?) silence.

STAYING IN CHARGE Seeing his kids' messy rec room, Snoop advises them, "Y'all need to clean this muthaf---ing room up." Thirteen-year-old Cordé agrees to tidy up *if* Snoop can beat him in a push-up contest. Snoop wins and retains his dignity, lost ever since his appearance on *The L Word*.

HEALTH & WELLNESS When his wife worries that he's unhealthily stressed-out, Snoop, realizing he wants to be around his kids for years to come, tries yoga. The rapper happily discovers that taking care of your mind, body, and spirit doesn't mean coming out of a deep haze: "That was like a workout with a blunt instructor. It made me sleepy."

LIFE LESSONS An avid soccer fan, Snoop attempts to get his brood into the sport, but their interest wanes. Luckily, Snoop is able to get David Beckham to come over for a coaching session. Becks provides an important tutorial not only in soccer but also in the importance of booking a famous guest star.

WHITE: JOHN M. HELLER/GETTY IMAGES; CSI: CLIFF LIPSON

SOUND BITES

"Well, I adore 'em. Except for the few sickos who write lesbian fan fiction about me and Bea Arthur."
—BETTY WHITE, DISCUSSING HER LEGION OF DEDICATED FANS, ON *UGLY BETTY*

"Oh my God, I will be so happy when you reexperience everything and that sparkle of wonder in your eyes goes dark again."
—ANDREA (JENNIFER ESPOSITO), WISHING AWAY SAMANTHA'S (CHRISTINA APPLEGATE) AMNESIA, ON *SAMANTHA WHO?*

"I like when a woman has ambition. It's like seeing a dog wearing clothes."
—JACK (ALEC BALDWIN), TO C.C. (EDIE FALCO), ON *30 ROCK*

"I think I've got a little crush on our sports guy. I know, but he used to play hockey, and I'm a Canadian. I can't help it. If he were missing some teeth, I probably would've already hit that."
—ROBIN (COBIE SMULDERS), DESCRIBING HER OFFICE INFATUATION, ON *HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER*

"A girl wants Romeo, not Hamlet.... He died for something exciting, and I want my debutante ball to be something to die for."
—BLAIR (LEIGHTON MEESTER) ON *GOSSIP GIRL*

THE CHART

THE RATINGS

1 CSI

Now that *Dancing With the Stars* has taken its final bow, the forensic crime drama has less competition for the top spot.

THE TOP 20

		VIEWERS*	LAST WEEK
1	**CSI** CBS, Thursday, 9 p.m.	18.8	18
2	**GREY'S ANATOMY** ABC, Thursday, 9 p.m.	17.8	37
3	**60 MINUTES** CBS, Sunday, 7:25 p.m.	16.5	16
4	**RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER** CBS, Tuesday, 8 p.m. ➔ *The 1964 classic soared high above the competition as the most-watched holiday special of the week. Other festive fare included ABC's 'Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town' (No. 26) and CBS' 'Frosty the Snowman' (No. 39).*	14.6	–
5	**SURVIVOR: CHINA** CBS, Thursday, 8 p.m.	13.9	14
6	**EXTREME MAKEOVER: HOME EDITION** ABC, Sunday, 8 p.m.	12.8	11
7	**SUNDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL** NBC, Sunday, 8:24 p.m.	12.7	12
	WITHOUT A TRACE CBS, Thursday, 10:01 p.m.	12.7	31
9	**MITCH ALBOM'S FOR ONE MORE DAY** ABC, Sunday, 9 p.m. ➔ *The Oprah Winfrey presentation didn't reincarnate the ratings of the two previous Mitch Albom telefilms, 'Tuesdays With Morrie' (1999) and 'The Five People You Meet in Heaven' (2004), which drew 22.5 and 18.6 million viewers, respectively.*	12.5	–
10	**THE AMAZING RACE** CBS, Sunday, 8:25 p.m.	11.9	24
	TWO AND A HALF MEN (R) CBS, Monday, 9 p.m.	11.9	10
12	**LAW & ORDER: SVU** NBC, Tuesday, 10 p.m.	11.7	19
13	**COLD CASE** CBS, Sunday, 9:25 p.m.	11.6	–
14	**DEAL OR NO DEAL** NBC, Wednesday, 8 p.m.	11.3	–
	BARBARA WALTERS PRESENTS... ABC, Thursday, 10 p.m. ➔ *It's Potter over politics as Walters' annual "most fascinating" list, topped by J.K. Rowling, drew 2.5 million more viewers than last year's, which was led by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.*	11.3	–
16	**NCIS (R)** CBS, Tuesday, 9:04 p.m.	11.1	–
	HEROES NBC, Monday, 9 p.m.	11.1	20
18	**HOUSE (R)** Fox, Tuesday, 9 p.m.	10.5	7
19	**PRIVATE PRACTICE** ABC, Wednesday, 9 p.m.	10.4	–
	CSI: NY (R) CBS, Wednesday, 10 p.m.	10.4	13

* IN MILLIONS WEEK OF DEC. 3–9, 2007 SOURCE: NIELSEN MEDIA RESEARCH

BY WHITNEY PASTOREK

WHAT to WATCH

A day-to-day guide to notable programs*

Leighton Meester: Lookin' smart in tartan

WEDNESDAY

9–10PM

Gossip Girl The CW, TV-14-DL HD

The anonymous blogger-to-the-Upper-East-Side-stars has a present for you, *Gossip*mongers. Yep, you guessed it: extra-delicious holiday dish served up in a decadent Christmas episode. It's hard to discuss without spoiling plot points, so here's a safe preview: Prepare yourself for a very unexpected proposal, a much more expected breakup, two disappointed teenagers, and one nasty grinch. Plus—who would've guessed it?—a load of scandalous text-messaging. Although a satisfying end to a well-played half season, the festive festivities bring me to an important question: Is it really plausible that not one of these New Yorkers is Jewish? Oy vey! **B+** *—Tanner Stransky*

Monday 12.17

Series Debut

8–10PM
Clash of the Choirs
NBC, TV-PG
Something's disingenuous about calling a four-day choir competition a "clash." Unless they sing Clash songs. Or have knife fights.

8–9:30PM
Hard as Nails
HBO, TV-MA HD
Documentary about a minister who uses Crucifixion reenactments to reach at-risk teens. Knife-fighting choirs suddenly seem *very* possible.

9–10PM
Seven Ages of Rock
VH1 Classic, TV-14-L
Weeklong series on rock genres from 1960 to the present. Speaking of choirs, isn't running this on the retro channel the definition of "preaching to the"?

9–10PM
Hamburger Paradise
Travel, TV-G
As part of "Pilot Week," the net welcomes your feedback on this burger travelogue. Great idea. If nothing else, Americans have incredibly discerning taste when it comes to TV.

9–10PM
Anime: Drawing a Revolution
Starz, TV-14
So it's like an influential medium. Whatevs. They're still just cartoons. [*Ducking*]

10–10:30PM
The Soup Presents: The Soup Awards
E!, TV-14
Best and worst from the worldwide leader in snark. Wait, isn't that *us*?

10–11PM
CSI: Miami
CBS, TV-14-DLV HD
The team finds a meth lab at a dead girl's pad. Further proof that crack may be wack, but METH = DETH.

10–11PM
100 Greatest Songs of the '90s
VH1, TV-PG
Weeklong Event Week continues, and somewhere, the members of Marcy Playground accept the inevitable reality that they'll rank somewhere far beneath Nirvana, *again*.

PREVIEW

8–9:30PM
Duel
ABC
When I heard the title, I was secretly hoping for a medieval competition with swords, armor, and perhaps a little blood. But nope, *Duel* is a six-night trivia tourney. So what's the difference between this and every other *Identity Deal vs. 100* game show? For starters, 24 contestants pair off to compete, and the winner stands to earn over $1.5 million. Also, instead of an '80s comedian as host, there's a sports-radio personality (Mike Greenberg) running the show. Tune in to see if he strikes out. *—Jessica Shaw*

GOSSIP GIRL: ERIC LIEBOWITZ; *DUEL*: ADAM LARKEY

*TIMES ARE EASTERN STANDARD AND ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Tuesday 12.18

Season THIN-ale!

9–10:59PM
The Biggest Loser
NBC, TV-PG
See what I did up there? Just a little gift from me to you, Ben Silverman. xoxo

9–11PM*
An Unreasonable Man
PBS, TV-PG
What better time to embrace Ralph Nader than the season of charity and forgiveness?
**check local listings*

Nestor Carbonell, Smits, and Elizondo

10–11PM
Boston Legal
ABC, TV-14 HD
Holiday ep involves a 14-year-old porn addict. Porn does make some folks extra jolly.

VARIOUS TIMES/NETWORKS
Choirs/Rock/*Pilots/ '90s Songs/*Duel
Just in case that whole Weeklong Event concept didn't sink in yesterday.

10–11PM
Cane CBS, TV-14-LV HD
Much as we enjoy watching Jimmy Smits stroll soulfully in rainy slo-mo, *Cane* feels like it's stuck in *Jimmy loves trouble!* replay mode. First, Smits' Alex Vega had the fuzz sniffing around after he had a bad guy whacked. Then he tainted his family's reputation by associating with gangsters. In tonight's episode, he gets busted for a crime he *didn't* commit. From Smits to Hector Elizondo to Mel Harris (guest-starring as Alex's gung ho lawyer), *Cane* has one of the strongest casts on TV. We can only hope that, post-strike, the writers will give them all story lines that actually go somewhere. B– —*Missy Schwartz*

Wednesday 12.19

McKidd and Egolf journey to the center of the face

10–10:59PM
Journeyman NBC, TV-PG-LV HD
Time-traveling to just earlier in the year, Dan (Kevin McKidd) lands in a psychiatric institution, where an eager patient, Evan (Don McManus), claims to be a fellow traveler trying to find his true love from college. Do they really share powers, or is he just—all together now!—crazy? With old-school stand-alone plots like this one, *Journeyman* may lack the Web cred of *Lost* or *Heroes*, but its earnest, romantic heart charms. As Evan's quest to rekindle past feelings parallels Katie's (Gretchen Egolf) struggles with marriage to a disappearing hubby, it's refreshing to feel like you've traveled to an era before TV discovered cynicism. B —*Josh Wolk*

8–9PM
Explorer: Last Christians of Bethlehem
Nat. Geographic, TV-PG HD
The city's Christian residents are caught between Islamic fundamentalists and Israeli forces. Plus, the Baby Jesus told me it's impossible to find a decent hotel there.

10–11PM*
Christmas at St. Olaf
PBS, TV-G HD
If you're not already on choir overload—as though there *is* such a thing—try this.
**check local listings*

10:02–11PM
ExxonMobil Presents a Holiday Celebration at Ford's Theatre
ABC, TV-PG
Now that you mention it, I don't think letting a giant oil corporation sponsor an annual presidential gala is awkward at all.

CANE: CLIFF LIPSON; JOURNEYMAN: JUSTIN LUBIN

Thursday 12.20

Step *away* from the microphone

9–10PM
Biography: Billy Ray Cyrus Bio, TV-PG HD
From humble Kentucky upbringing to blazing flame-out to late-career rejuvenation, the former owner of the world's most ludicrous mullet is the stuff the stentorian tone of *Biography* is made for. How nice to see folks like Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn in his corner, willing to admit that, like it or not, "Achy Breaky Heart," changed country music forever (though Billy Ray may be reaching in equating himself, Elvis, and Johnny Cash). Bonus points to the producers for not blatantly exploiting *Hannah Montana*. And kudos to the man himself for still having some of the worst hair in the business. Hey, if it ain't broke... B

7–9AM
Prancer
ABC Family, TV-G
Maybe next time, Donner.

8–9PM
Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?
Fox, TV-PG
Could a fifth grader have made that "THIN-ale" joke? I don't think so.

8–10PM
Big
MyNetworkTV, TV-PG
My friend Becky used to work at FAO Schwarz. Her experience is in no way mirrored by this film.

9–9:30PM
Good Times
TV Land, TV-PG
Christmas Eve at the taxi garage, complete with musical numbers. They don't make 'em like this anymore, kids.

Friday 12.21

A Clark Brother goes solo

SEASON FINALE

9–10PM
The Next Great American Band Fox, TV-PG-L HD
Reality shows are supposed to be the kings of TV watercoolers, but what happens when you're the only person watching? Well, I've been having an awesome conversation-of-one over *The Next Great American Band*. We reminisce about loving retro act Très Bien!, laugh at how we wanted to punch the TV whenever cheesy copycat rockers Dot Dot Dot took the stage, and wonder why judge Ian Dickson actually encourages people to refer to him as "Dicko." I simply can't wait to see the Clark Brothers win tonight's finale. And then talk all about it...with myself. —*Dalton Ross*

Saturday 12.22

4–6PM
Brian Boitano Skating Spectacular
NBC, TV-G
I don't want to overstate things, but if you're not completely fascinated by the idea of Barry Manilow performing '70s music while Brian Boitano and Dorothy Hamill ice-skate on a rink built in the middle of a baseball stadium, there is something very wrong with you.

8–10PM
The True Story of Charlie Wilson
History, TV-PG
Because movies are more fun when you can spot the historical inaccuracies.

8–10PM
Elf
CBS, TV-PG-L HD
My favorite color is orange. Please don't hug me.

What's this about a duck in a box?

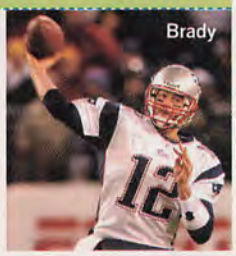
8–9:30PM
SNL: The Best of '06/'07 NBC, TV-14-D HD
For those who bemoan the current *SNL* in light of a too-fondly-remembered past, tonight's show—a look back at the last full season before the WGA strike took the funny writing people away—proves that some good stuff has indeed happened recently, like Jake Gyllenhaal's *Dreamgirls* drag, Bill Hader's exquisite, train-stealing Peter O'Toole, and the sheer existence of Kristen Wiig. My only real qualms involve the presence of "Deep House Dish," and the absence of both musical guests and Alec Baldwin... though the regifting of the events pictured above goes a long way toward making up for this. (R) B

Sunday 12.23

7–7:30PM
The Simpsons
Fox, TV-PG-SV
Last year's Christmas ep; this year's ads. (R)

7–8PM
Elmo's Christmas Countdown
ABC, TV-G
Squeaky monster gets a star-studded special.

9–11PM
In God's Name
CBS
The Dalai Lama, the Pope, and 10 other religious leaders share their views in a new film from the Frenchmen behind *9/11*. And while I feel weird that the end of What to Watch 2007 turned out so sincere, I couldn't help it. So here's all of us wishing all of you a very happy holiday season—no matter what you believe.


Brady

4:15–COMPLETION*
New England Patriots vs. Miami Dolphins
CBS HD
The Pats haven't lost a game. The Dolphins—whose 1972 squad had the only perfect season in NFL history—have lost every single one. Of course, by the time this contest rolls around, those facts may have changed. But we're relatively confident that Tom Brady will throw for approximately 612 yards and 7 TDs...by halftime.
**not available in all markets*

CYRUS: TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES; *BIG SHOTS*: ADAM TAYLOR; *NEXT GREAT AMERICAN BAND*: FRANK MICELOTTA; *SNL*: DANA EDELSON; BRADY: G FIUME/GETTY IMAGES

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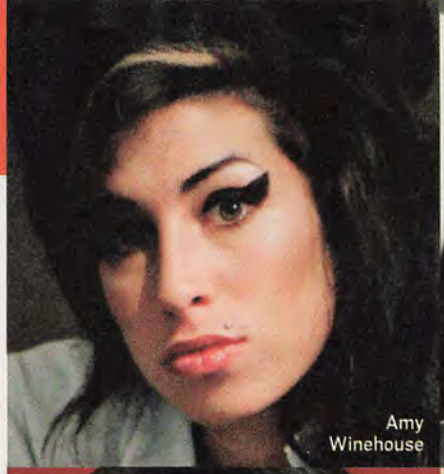
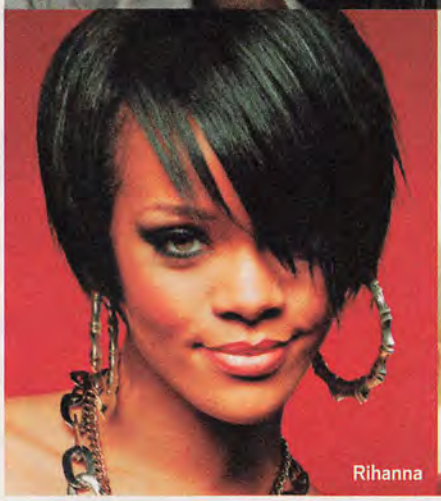
Grammy Mixtape

Eager as we are about the latest crop of nominees? Have we got a playlist for you.

BY LEAH GREENBLATT


Amy Winehouse

T.I.


Rihanna

Foo Fighters Dave Grohl

Last week, the Recording Academy doled out its Grammy nods, full of surprise additions and omissions. (Welcome to the Best New Artist party, obscure soul chanteuse Ledisi! Daughtry, not so much!) In anticipation of the official *2008 Grammy Nominees* disc, a grab bag of singles from the contenders expected next month, we've devised our own mixtape: For every likely compilation selection ("The Single," below), we're offering an equally worthy, but unsung, song from choice honorees.

AMY WINEHOUSE

The Single "Rehab"
Our Pick "Back to Black"
Old-soul heartache twists the knife on this devastating Spector-tinged lament.

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

The Single "Radio Nowhere"
Our Pick "Girls in Their Summer Clothes"
The Boss recalls that old E Street Band magic with a bittersweet slice of sunset nostalgia.

VINCE GILL

The Single "The Reason Why"
Our Pick "Sweet Thing"
Gill's honky-tonkin' stomper captures the beer-stained glory of a roadhouse jukebox.

KANYE WEST

The Single "Stronger"
Our Pick "Good Morning"
Hip-hop's favorite peacock forsakes his bluster on this stripped-down, surprisingly thoughtful cut.

FEIST

The Single "1234"
Our Pick "My Moon, My Man"
The songstress' dulcet vocals float like smoke over punchy percussion and a galloping piano.

T.I.

The Single "Big Things Poppin' (Do It)"
Our Pick "Tell 'Em I Said That"
A harpsichord melody brings the rapper's silver-tongued menace to a haunting crescendo.

WHITE STRIPES

The Single "Icky Thump"
Our Pick "Rag and Bone"
Jack and Meg banter like Johnny and June on this bluesy, bare-bones good time.

FOO FIGHTERS

The Single "The Pretender"
Our Pick "Long Road to Ruin"
An epic rocker with a sweeping chorus, it's a worthy sequel to their '99 classic "Learn to Fly."

RIHANNA

The Single "Umbrella"
Our Pick "Breakin' Dishes"
A wayward lover gets the baby diva *pissed*—and inspires a killer woman-scorned hook.

FERGIE

The Single "Big Girls Don't Cry"
Our Pick "Mary Jane Shoes"
The pop Dutchess' riff on Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry" becomes an intoxicating anthem.

Backstory

+ Feb. 10's ceremony will mark the Grammys' 50th anniversary. The inaugural year's big winners included Henry Mancini and Ella Fitzgerald, who each nabbed two statues. Frank Sinatra picked one up too—as art director for *Only the Lonely* cover (above).

Complete Fiasco

The restless rapper's aural curiosity makes for a *Cool*, diverse follow-up.

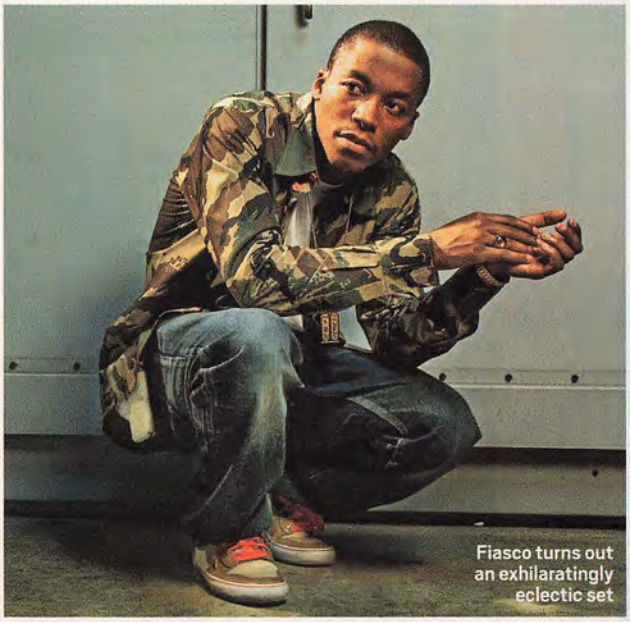
BY CHRIS WILLMAN

Lupe Fiasco
Lupe Fiasco's The Cool
(1st & 15th/ Atlantic)
Hip-Hop

Last year, Fiasco set himself apart from the rap pack with a debut full of brainy, Kanye-style positivity, including a laid-back skateboarding anthem, "Kick, Push." You might wonder what happened to that guy if you've read how his follow-up, *The Cool*, is a concept album about gangsta life. But in truth, only four songs address that story line—thankfully leaving the bulk of this CD to instead indulge in Fiasco's divergent themes and musical explorations.

Want self-righteous anger? See "Dumb It Down," where he imitates fellow rappers and white execs urging him to get crass ("Pour champagne on the b----!" he bellows satirically). Want blistering social commentary? Check out "Little Weapon," which conflates videogame violence with the real stuff. Want wistfulness? "Fighters" laments that "when the fighters are all around, all the lovers are underground." Want bubblegum? Head to the album's climax, the goofy, girl-crazy "Go Baby Go."

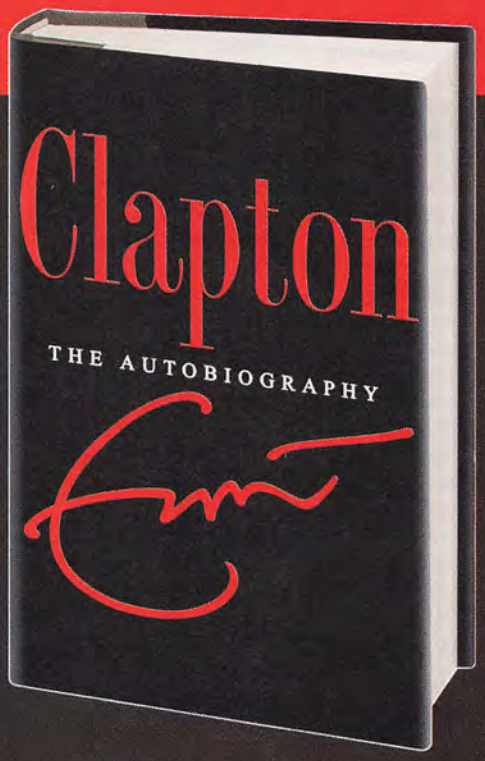
Sonically, he's got the same kind of gratifying ADD going on. Some tracks, like "Paris, Tokyo," contrast his Twista-style rapid-fire delivery with a lazy rhythm that's close to smooth jazz. "Hello/Goodbye," at the other extreme, has U.K. electro outfit U.N.K.L.E. providing a tense rock feel. Fiasco's wide-ranging pop instincts rarely fail him, even on the few cuts that *are* steeped in the street-life narrative. It turns out randomness makes for a surprisingly unifying concept. **A–** >DOWNLOAD THIS: **"Hello/Goodbye"**



Fiasco turns out an exhilaratingly eclectic set

SEBASTIAN ARTZ/RETNA

THE GIFT THAT ROCKS.



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Broadway Books

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(Nonesuch)
Soundtrack

He can anchor a $2.7 billion franchise, but can Johnny Depp belt out a Broadway ballad in Tim Burton's new film? Just listen to the haunting "My Friends," in which the actor's murderous Demon Barber of Fleet Street serenades his razors. Partner in crime Helena Bonham Carter unveils an unimpressive soprano, though Alan Rickman's creepy judge is shiveringly seductive. And thanks to the lush orchestrations, Stephen Sondheim's score—all jagged harmonies and beautiful dissonance—has never seemed more alive. **B+**
—Melissa Rose Bernardo
>DOWNLOAD THIS:
"By the Sea"

Wu-Tang Clan
8 Diagrams
(Wu Music Group/Loud/SRC/Universal Motown)
Rap

Six years after their last album, much has changed for the Clan. Sure, ODB died, but that ain't the half of it. Producer RZA—geeked off his recent soundtrack work (*Ghost Dog*, *Kill Bill*)—is mucking about with live instruments and limp beats. The result is a drab dilution of the Wu's signature sample-heavy, raucous sound. Meanwhile, Raekwon, Meth & Co. have lost their lyrical ferocity. Judging by this disappointing return, Wu-Tang may not be forever after all. **C–** *—Neil Drumming*
>DOWNLOAD THIS:
"Windmill"

CHOICE CUTS

EW.COM EXCLUSIVE
TAYLOR SWIFT, "Christmases When You Were Mine"
The Best New Artist Grammy nom offers this acoustic version of her melancholy country ballad. (ew.com/taylorswift)

SNOOP DOGG, "Sensual Seduction"
His sweet dirty-disco come-on? It's even better with superfly visuals to match. (YouTube)

GRIZZLY BEAR, "He Hit Me"
The avant-rockers turn the '62 Crystals classic into a Brian Wilson-esque beauty. (myspace.com/grizzlybear) —LG

THE CHART

TOP ALBUMS

1 JOSH GROBAN

Noël sold 581K, more than any Xmas CD since '94, when Kenny G sold 819K *Miracles* in a week.

THE TOP 20

		LAST WEEK	WEEKS ON CHART
1	**JOSH GROBAN** *Noël*, Reprise/143	1	9
2	**ALICIA KEYS** *As I Am*, J	3	4
3	**EAGLES** *Long Road Out of Eden*, Eagles Recording Co. II	2	6
4	**VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Now That's What I Call Music! 26*, Capitol	4	4
5	**MILEY CYRUS** *Hannah Montana 2/Meet...*, Disney/Hollywood	7	24
6	**VARIOUS ARTISTS** *High School Musical 2* soundtrack, Disney	6	17
7	**CARRIE UNDERWOOD** *Carnival Ride*, Arista Nashville/19 Recordings	9	7
8	**GARTH BROOKS** *The Ultimate Hits*, Pearl	5	5
9	**TAYLOR SWIFT** *Taylor Swift*, Big Machine *The chart's upper reaches aren't teeming with Grammy nominees right now, but Swift enjoyed some spoils from her nod for Best New Artist, moving back up into the top 10.*	12	59
10	**BLAKE LEWIS** *Audio Day Dream*, 19 Recordings/Arista *The 'American Idol' runner-up's single, "Break Anotha," hasn't been busting up any airplay charts. But his album debuted with a respectable 98K, not terribly far below the 119K that season 6 winner Jordin Sparks bowed with last month.*	—	1
11	**MANNHEIM STEAMROLLER** *Christmas Song*, American Gramaphone	10	9
12	**CELINE DION** *Taking Chances*, Columbia	8	4
13	**CHRIS BROWN** *Exclusive*, Jive/Zomba	11	5
14	**RASCAL FLATTS** *Still Feels Good*, Lyric Street	14	11
15	**JONAS BROTHERS** *Jonas Brothers*, Hollywood	15	18
16	**LED ZEPPELIN** *Mothership*, Swan Song/Atlantic	13	4
17	**SCARFACE** *Made*, Rap-A-Lot/Asylum *The Houston rapper made a modest 63K entry, just beating the 58K that his previous CD opened with in a non-holiday period last year.*	—	1
18	**COLBIE CAILLAT** *Coco*, Universal Republic	16	21
19	**SUGARLAND** *Enjoy the Ride*, Mercury Nashville	20	57
20	**VARIOUS ARTISTS** *Hannah Montana* soundtrack, Disney	22	59

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A 'BUBBLY' SURPRISE!

After a toastworthy year, Colbie Caillat readies herself for single No. 2, a trip overseas, and more quality time on your TV

"Bubbly," the sweet—and inescapable—folk-pop ditty currently playing on a radio station (and in a shopping mall, airport, doctor's waiting room...) near you, is undeniably one of 2007's biggest sleeper hits. And nobody is more surprised than Colbie Caillat, the unassuming 22-year-old who wrote it. Why? Because her song's tender, love-struck sentiments are, technically, fictional. "I was sitting at home," she recalls, brushing back her long wheat-colored hair, "and I didn't have a crush on anyone. I was thinking about that—all sad, bored, and lonely—and I wrote the song."

A Malibu native and the daughter of famed Fleetwood Mac producer Ken Caillat (*Rumours*), she began singing in Hollywood bars and coffeehouses just last year. Fairly quickly, the MySpace numbers for "Bubbly" climbed to an impressive 50,000 plays a day—catnip to the major labels, who soon came calling. To date, her debut album, *Coco* (out on Universal Republic), has sold nearly 800,000 copies, and the video for "Bubbly," a Top 40 smash, has even gained regular airplay on CMT. Come January, Caillat will test her staying power with the release of a second single, "Realize." She'll also bring her breezy California sound to more exotic climes this spring, traveling on a promotional tour to Europe and Asia. First, however, the shy singer has had to surmount an even greater obstacle: shooting more videos. "I was terrified. I'm not an actress!" she says. "Songwriting and singing... [That's] where my heart is." *—LG*

SNOOP DOGG: JASON MERRITT/FILMMAGIC; CAILLAT: PETER KRAMER/AP

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Mom de Guerre

Susanna Sonnenberg had a very bad mother, as she recalls in her scabrous memoir.

BY KAREN VALBY

Sonnenberg takes a swing

Her Last Death
Susanna Sonnenberg
Memoir

As the story goes, when Susanna Sonnenberg was 2 years old, Norman Mailer took one look at her and pronounced to her mother that "Susy's got a great ass. It's going to get her into trouble one day." The anecdote means to both impress and horrify, and it captures the flavor of *Her Last Death*, Sonnenberg's bracing memoir about growing up rich and glamorous with a savagely inappropriate, drug-addicted mother. This is a world where Bob Dylan is a neighbor, Grandpa had an affair with Ingrid Bergman, and Mum tearfully gives her child a Montblanc fountain pen and a gram of cocaine for her 16th birthday. For every breathless tale of outrageousness, Sonnenberg simultaneously struggles, with cool gravity, to grapple with what it means to be the daughter of a liar. Throughout the narrative, she second-guesses her memories, and gives airtime to the family members who shrug off her recollection of events.

Her Last Death opens with a wreck. Daphne, as Sonnenberg calls her peacock of a mother, is in a coma after a head-on collision following a dinner party in Barbados. The author, then 37 and at a safe remove in Montana with her husband and two young sons, is asked to come at once. But after years of suffering through her mother's manufactured crises, she refuses to get sucked in again and stays put in her carefully cobbled-together life.

Thus begins Sonnenberg's story of how she sawed herself loose from her mother's manicured tentacles. Inevitably, as in any tale of childhood trauma, there's something of the "If you thought *your* mom was nuts, get a load of this!" stream of horrors. Daphne got her drunk at 12, bragged about sleeping with her teenage love interests, overdosed in front of her, and punched her in the stomach if she ever thought her daughter was giving her own boyfriend the eye. Daphne was beautiful and funny but in every way a disgrace of a parent. No wonder the author ended up confusing sex for power and screwed her way through her 20s. There are points in the author's chronicles of seduction—maybe around the time she squirts raspberries into a magazine writer's mouth and beds an Orthodox rabbi—that Sonnenberg risks becoming that tiresome girl at the party for whom other women have little patience.

Perhaps that's what's most brave about this often coarse story. For all Daphne's failings, Sonnenberg writes just as candidly about her own. There's shame in these pages, and an artful floundering for acceptance and understanding. Also, as in her tender memory of her mother scooping her shivering, 3-year-old body out of the bathtub and wrapping her tight in a warm towel, there's beauty. **B+**

Backstory

+ Sonnenberg and her publisher, Scribner, must still smell the carcass of *A Million Little Pieces* "memoirist" James Frey (above). In an author's note, she cops to creating composite characters and specifies that *Death* is "subject to the imperfections of memory."

SONNENBERG: ANDREW GEIGER; FREY: TANA LEE ALVES/WIREIMAGE.COM

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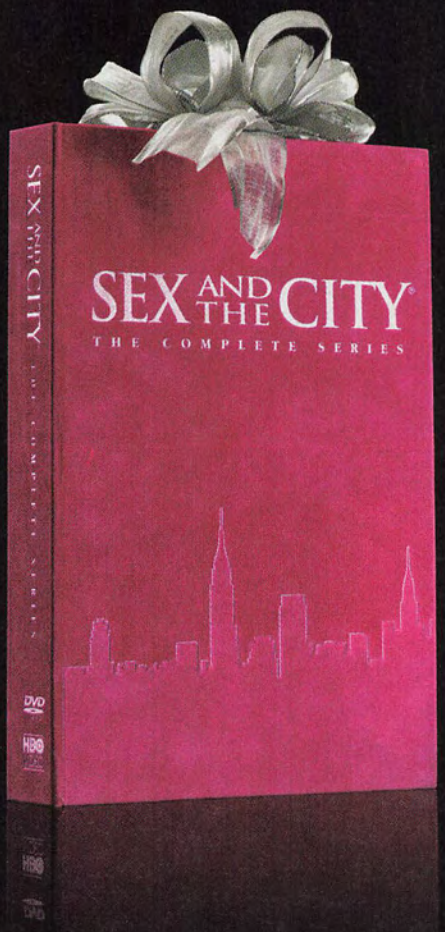

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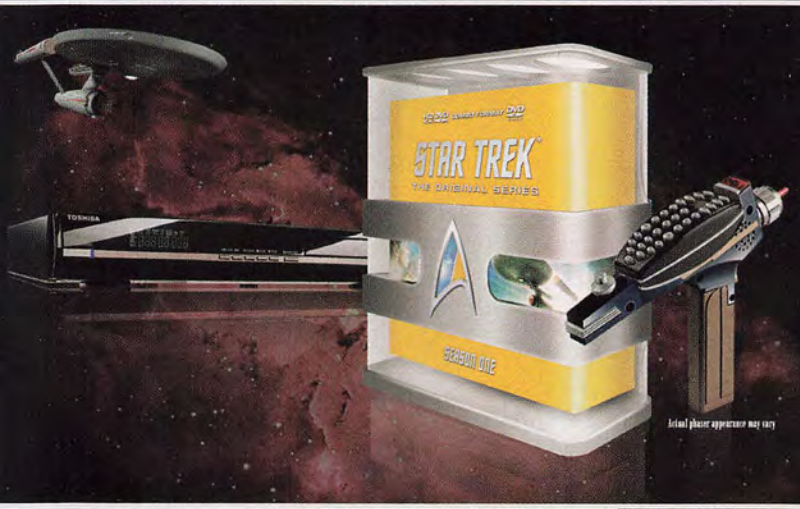

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REEL LIT

With so many literary adaptations in theaters this month, readers face the usual dilemma—see the movies or just hit the books? We look at just how faithful the current crop is to its source material.

1. THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY Jean-Dominique Bauby *(paperback)* The late editor of French *Elle* wrote his remarkable '97 memoir, which describes being paralyzed by "locked-in syndrome," by blinking his left eyelid. Director Julian Schnabel's film translates Bauby's rich language into bold visuals; we even watch the hero's right eye get sewn shut *from his perspective*. **Last Word** Though the movie is masterful, nothing can top the book's poetic beauty. *—Missy Schwartz*

2. THE GOLDEN COMPASS Philip Pullman *(paperback)* Adapting the first book in Pullman's trilogy about 12-year-old Lyra and her magic alethiometer, auteur Chris Weitz downplays the Magisterium's religious nature and leaves out the gore: Ice bear Iorek's battle drops the heart-eating ritual; the truncated ending also omits Lord Asriel's sacrifice of Lyra's best pal, Roger. **Last Word** Not surprisingly, Weitz softens the book's religious, violent elements to create family-friendlier fare. *—Youyoung Lee*

3. THE KITE RUNNER Khaled Hosseini *(paperback)* Screenwriter David Benioff's adaptation skims past much of the final chapters—e.g., Amir struggling to adopt his orphaned nephew—but the film remains very faithful to Hosseini's best-seller. It even lifts the majority of its dialogue directly from the novel. **Last Word** The film's stunning cinematography may enhance your understanding of a war-torn Afghanistan, but it's impossible to match the novel's emotional power. *—Kate Ward*

4. ATONEMENT Ian McEwan *(paperback)* McEwan's 2002 best-seller about the lifelong consequences of a young girl's lie is transported nearly scene by scene to the big screen, with only a few tweaks to tighten the dramatic structure. **Last Word** Both book and movie pack an emotional punch, but director Joe Wright's sweeping adaptation struggles with its inability to go where the story's real action takes place: inside the minds of its characters. *—Adam Markovitz*

THE DIVING BELL AND THE BUTTERFLY: ETIENNE GEORGE; THE KITE RUNNER: PHIL BRAY; ATONEMENT: ALEX BAILEY

Bleeding Kansas

Sara Paretsky

Novel

In a break from her V.I. Warshawski mysteries, Paretsky cooks up this unruly melodrama that begins when a glamorous lesbian Wiccan relocates from NYC to the heartland. Soon, an impressionable local matron is dancing with witches, while a cartoonishly nasty, narrow-minded clan of hard-line Christians responds to her activities with violence. (At least in this novel, they represent what's the matter with Kansas.) To overcomplicate an already hectic narrative, Paretsky throws in star-crossed lovers, fundamentalist Jews, the Iraq war, and a decades-old fire. It's probably time to call Warshawski back into action. **B–** *—Jennifer Reese*

My Life as a Traitor

Zarah Ghahramani with Robert Hillman

Memoir

Ghahramani was a 20-year-old university student from a cultured Persian family when she was locked in Iran's notorious Evin prison for political activity she says amounted to letting her hair show from beneath her head scarf. She recounts her beatings with dignified anger in this vivid, sometimes horrifying memoir, mixing scenes from prison with sensual memories of her life before what her father called the regime of the "primitives." (She now lives in Australia.) Her strength: She doesn't let outrage overtake the striking feminine vitality of her storytelling. **A–** *—Lisa Schwarzbaum*

Elizabeth & Leicester

Sarah Gristwood

History

Books about fiery Queen Elizabeth I abound, but few have so carefully plumbed her tricky relationship with Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester. Though he was one of her favorite subjects, he was not, Gristwood shows, a mere plaything, but a serious thinker and statesman. Gristwood examines the murder of Leicester's first wife, Amy—a scandalous event that left the court wondering about Elizabeth's possible involvement—and tries to settle, once and for all, the question of whether the two ever had sex. Gristwood turns dense, occasionally stodgy history into a lively read. **A–** *—Tina Jordan*

People of the Book

Geraldine Brooks

Novel

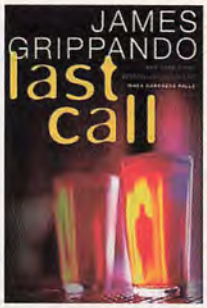
Hanna Heath is a brainy rare-books expert summoned to Sarajevo to study a 500-year-old Hebrew manuscript that turned up after the '90s Bosnian war. Brooks recounts Hanna's scholarly attempts to trace the volume's history, and in alternating chapters, dramatizes that history, following it backward in time from WWII-era Yugoslavia to 17th-century Venice to the Spanish Inquisition. The peripatetic tome embodies the long interrelationship—sometimes fruitful, often fraught—between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. But too often, you sense Brooks behind the scenes, pulling strings. **B** *—JR*

What's New in...Thrillers

FROM BOMBERS TO VAMPIRES

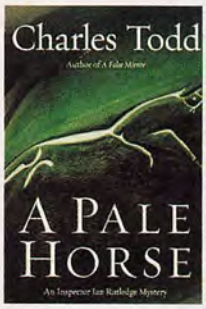
TOUCHSTONE

Laurie R. King In 1926, federal agent Harris Stuyvesant pursues a serial bomber to England, where he's forced to rely on traumatized war hero Bennett Grey's psychic skill to unmask the culprit among many high-society suspects. **Grisliest Death** The villain rigs the Bible with an explosive, blowing up an innocent in a chapel. **Bottom Line** King's meticulously plotted tale of an ordinary man with an extraordinary gift is an Anglophile's treat of sixth sense and sensibility. **B+** *—Paul Katz*



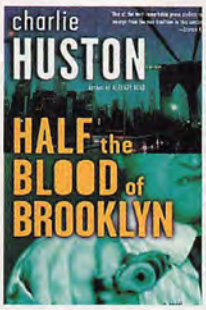
LAST CALL

James Grippando Defense lawyer Jack Swyteck's best friend, Theo, has a problem: One of his boys from the old hood has escaped from prison and is demanding cash. In return, he might reveal who brutally murdered Theo's mom almost 20 years ago. **Grisliest Death** A hooker is found on the street with her throat slit. **Bottom Line** The seventh Swyteck book is a nail-biter that draws a harrowing picture of the paranoia of both prison and the ghetto. **B+** *—Bob Cannon*



A PALE HORSE

Charles Todd Scotland Yard inspector Ian Rutledge, scarred by his time in the trenches during WWI and haunted—literally—by the ghost of a fellow soldier, investigates a perplexing series of murders in Yorkshire. **Grisliest Death** A man is found in the shadows of an abandoned abbey, wrapped in a cloak, an ancient gas mask strapped to his face. **Bottom Line** This deft psychological period piece may be the best yet by Todd, a pseudonymous mother-son writing team. **A** *—TJ*



HALF THE BLOOD OF BROOKLYN

Charlie Huston *(paperback)* Manhattan's vampire ecosystem is fragile, with too many bloodsuckers feeding on the same supply. So undead strong-arm Joe Pitt heads to the outer boroughs to keep an Orthodox danger at bay. (Yes, Jewish vamps. Yarmulkes and all.) **Grisliest Death** Some bloke gets decapitated and, for good measure, chopped to bits. **Bottom Line** Huston and his tenacious hero still have bite: *Brooklyn* is just as gutter-level smart as its forebears. **A–** *—Marc Bernardin*

Race Tracks

A 'Daily Show' scribe pens a satiric guide to racism. **By Gregory Kirschling**

At 15 or so, Sam Means encountered his first racial epithet, overhearing somebody use *Jew* as a pejorative verb. "It didn't offend me—it was shocking but not in a horrifying way," says Means, who at 26 is the youngest staff writer on *The Daily Show* (and also Jewish). "It was more like, 'Wow, people actually think that? How ridiculous of them!'"

Now, writing as a made-up old white professor named C.H. Dalton (think Stephen Colbert if he were deeply, deeply racist), Means has produced **A Practical Guide to Racism**, a faux textbook on the difference between races (think *America (The Book)*, if it were really, really offensive). He's even posting videos of fake lectures by Dalton, who's played by former *Daily Show* correspondent Dan Bakkedahl (on *apracticalguidetoracism.com*).

"Obviously, the whole book is absurd," says Means, who in person is more of a soft-spoken, shaggy-haired writer than a blustering blowhard in the Dalton mode. "Hating Merpeople makes as much sense as hating anybody else, which is why I threw in the whole chapter on Merpeople."

Ethel Merman

Brian Kellow

Biography

The singer's starry Broadway career, spanning 15 musicals and four decades, gets the red-carpet treatment in this reverent bio spotlighting the hits (*Annie Get Your Gun*, pitched to new mom Merman while in the hospital) and misses (*Happy Hunting*, opposite an underwear-free Fernando Lamas). After unapologetically detailing the diva's failures—Hollywood, husbands—Kellow gets oddly defensive; she was "temperamental," he reasons, because "her talent was so immense." Still, he is right about the Merm's 1979 disco album: "the biggest joke of Ethel's career since her quickie marriage to Ernest Borgnine." **B** *—Melissa Rose Bernardo*

Vermeer's Hat

Timothy Brook

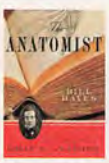
Nonfiction

Johannes Vermeer was a master not only of light and color, but of ennobling the ordinary activities of 17th-century Delft citizens. Generally, his subjects toil before an open window in a very confined space. Brook utilizes the props in Vermeer's tableaux as starting points to journey into the cultural and economic world of that time: A teacup pours forth the history of porcelain trade with China, while a felt hat is traced to beaver trapping in North America. It's a fascinating approach to cultural history, providing new ways of thinking about the origins of commonplace objects. **A** *—Michele Romero*

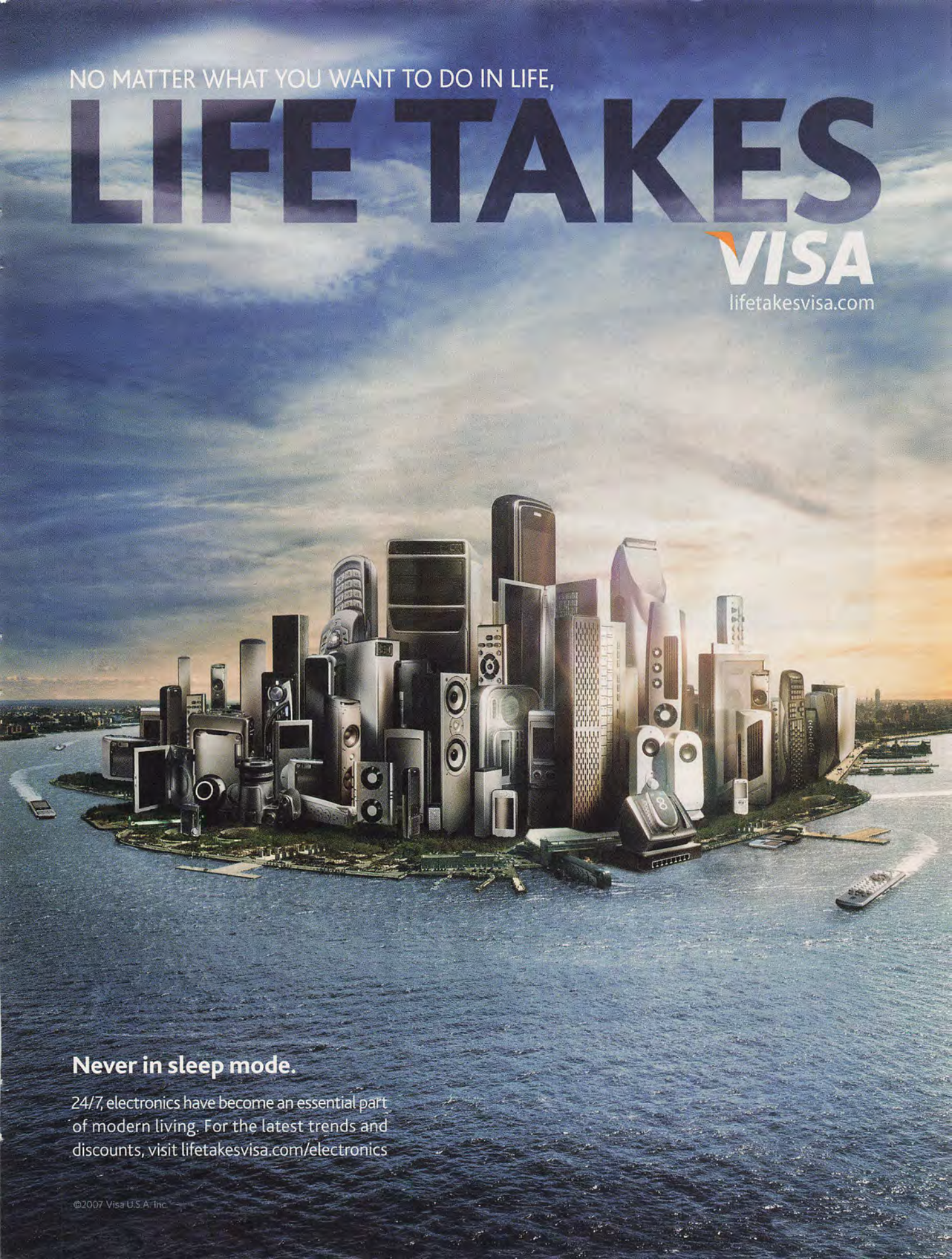
The Anatomist

Bill Hayes

Nonfiction



A less smitten biographer might have abandoned writing about Henry Gray when he learned that scant historical record remained of the anatomist behind the classic 1858 medical tome that would spawn a hit TV show. Instead, Hayes pursues Gray in the copious and, alas, dull letters and diaries of his uncredited collaborator/illustrator, H.V. Carter. Luckily, Hayes fleshes out his research by enrolling in anatomy courses, and proves a wholly entertaining guide to the little-known world of dissection labs. At his first glimpse of the customarily gauze-bandaged feet of a cadaver, he thinks: "Oh, it's wounded!" **B** *—Joan Keener*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Cameras and camcorders top this year's holiday hot list.

Stop! Wait! Hold on! Electronics are designed to help you keep up with modern life. But how in the world are you supposed to keep up with electronics? Every year, more and more gadgets with more features show up in more and more places. And this year is no exception.

Digital cameras and camcorders are everybody's must-have items this year. It's no surprise. People are embracing high-definition and Blu-ray Disc™ technology like never before, because this new generation of HD cameras and camcorders allows them to capture and view their memories in lifelike high definition on their compatible HDTVs (HD component cable required). And with new features available on select models, including in-camera retouching and face detection, people are no longer just taking snapshots and home movies. They're taking photographs and recording footage like real professionals.

And because the technology has been around for a few years, upgrading to better lenses and better picture quality won't cost as much as you might think.

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A Version of the Truth

Jennifer Kaufman and Karen Mack

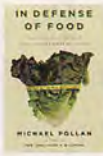
Novel

In this awkward but oddly endearing fusion of chick lit and a college survey course, dyslexic high school dropout Cassie Shaw finds herself an unemployable widow in Topanga Canyon, Calif., at age 30. Like many a spirited heroine before her, she fakes it, landing a girl Friday post for two professors at a nearby university thanks to her (imaginary) B.A. In the midst of her night school musings on Descartes and Thoreau, Cassie begins to seek out a different kind of education—traveling her own bumpy path to romance and self-realization. **B** —*Leah Greenblatt*

In Defense of Food

Michael Pollan

Nonfiction



"Eat Food. Not too much. Mostly plants." So begins Pollan's snappy, commonsensical companion to 2006's hulking *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. In this witty, blessedly bite-size summation of his research, Pollan marches through the sorry history of nutrition science (margarine, anyone?), then offers advice that ranges from planting a garden to shunning products that tout health-enhancing properties ("Don't take the silence of the yams as a sign that they have nothing valuable to say about health"). Unlike, say, a lite potato chip, this book of Pollan lite is not only crisp and tasty, but good for you. **A–** —*JR*

Gone and Back Again

Jonathon Scott Fuqua

Novel

PAPERBACK

Narrating with hindsight, Caley dissects his descent into depression and paranoia when he was an 11-year-old with an expanding waistline. Beyond the usual growing pains, he battles neglectful parents, suffers insomnia, dabbles with alcohol, and develops a real fear of *Star Trek* ("It's...sort of trying to get me," he says cryptically). The self-loathing underdog calls himself "the kind of kid who, even if you wanted to, you didn't care about." But that's where he's wrong: You can't help but salute the plucky boy and the rich confession that is this bold, darkly humorous tale. **B+** —*Tanner Stransky*

CECELIA AHERN

...Is Having a Moment!

The 26-year-old Dubliner co-created the ABC sitcom *Samantha Who?*, one of the season's few new hits. *P.S. I Love You*, the weepy movie based on her first novel that stars Hilary Swank and Gerard Butler, hits theaters this month. And her fifth novel, *There's No Place Like Here*, is just landing in stores. It's about a woman who tracks down missing people for a living—until she gets lost herself.

+ THE CHELSEA EFFECT Though her father is Irish prime minister Bertie Ahern, she doesn't help write his speeches: "Dad deals with reality and I deal with fiction." Even so, she's become a staple of the Irish press. "Everyone here knows my personal life," she says. "I like to travel because I can actually talk about my stories."

+ SO MUCH FOR SLACKING THROUGH HER 20s "I finished college and the next step was going to be a master's in film production," she says. "I'd be making coffee for someone somewhere if I hadn't started writing."

+ 'OZ' OBSESSION Ahern cops to the many *Oz* parallels in *No Place*: "I love *The Wizard of Oz*. I watch it every Christmas. That and *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*."

+ REMOTE CONTROL How does she manage to produce *Samantha Who?* from Dublin? "A lot of conference calls." But she does see Hollywood's allure: "When I went to pitch the show at that massive lot in Burbank, there was a big casino for *Ocean's Thirteen* and a *Pirates of the Caribbean* set. I felt like I was in Disney World." —*Jessica Shaw*

THE CHARTS

HARDCOVER BEST-SELLERS

1 DOUBLE CROSS

Once again, James Patterson lands at No. 1 with an Alex Cross mystery, this one about a string of murders in Washington, D.C.

	FICTION TOP 10	WEEKS ON LIST
1	**DOUBLE CROSS** James Patterson ➔ *The 13th novel in Patterson's Alex Cross series has 1.5 million copies in print.*	3
2	**THE DARKEST EVENING OF THE YEAR** Dean Koontz	1
3	**A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS** Khaled Hosseini	28
4	**STONE COLD** David Baldacci	4
5	**WORLD WITHOUT END** Ken Follett	8
6	**PLAYING FOR PIZZA** John Grisham	10
7	**HOME TO HOLLY SPRINGS** Jan Karon	5
8	**HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATHLY HALLOWS** J.K. Rowling	21
9	**THE CHOICE** Nicholas Sparks	10
10	**THE CHASE** Clive Cussler	4

	NONFICTION TOP 10	WEEKS ON LIST
1	**YOU: STAYING YOUNG** Michael F. Roizen, M.D. & Mehmet C. Oz, M.D.	5
2	**I AM AMERICA (AND SO CAN YOU!)** Stephen Colbert	8
3	**THE DARING BOOK FOR GIRLS** Andrea J. Buchanan & Miriam Peskowitz ➔ *Collins follows the breakout success of its early-20th-century-style manual for boys (see No. 6, below) with a distaff edition offering lessons on wrapping packages and skipping stones. While 'Boys' boasts 1.8 million copies after 19 printings, the 'Girls' pressrun stands at 1.5 million copies after seven printings.*	5
4	**DECEPTIVELY DELICIOUS** Jessica Seinfeld	8
5	**AN INCONVENIENT BOOK** Glenn Beck ➔ *The talk-show host takes on Al Gore and political correctness in his latest screed. After six trips to press, there are 488,000 copies.*	2
6	**THE DANGEROUS BOOK FOR BOYS** Conn & Hal Iggulden	28
7	**BOOM!** Tom Brokaw	4
8	**BORN STANDING UP** Steve Martin	2
9	**GOOD DOG. STAY.** Anna Quindlen	2
10	**THE SECRET** Rhonda Byrne	48

SOURCE: *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*, WEEK OF DEC. 3–7, 2007

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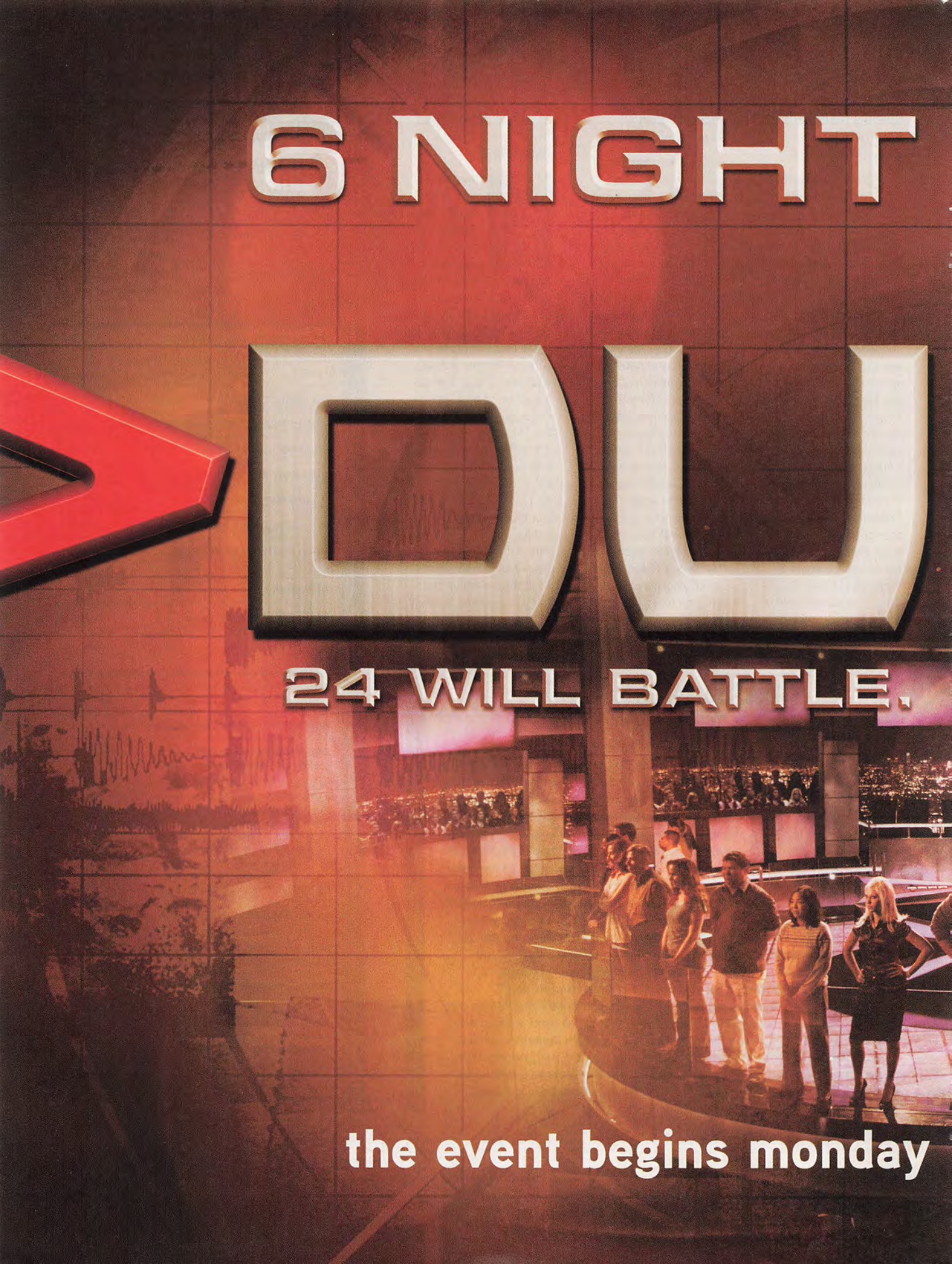
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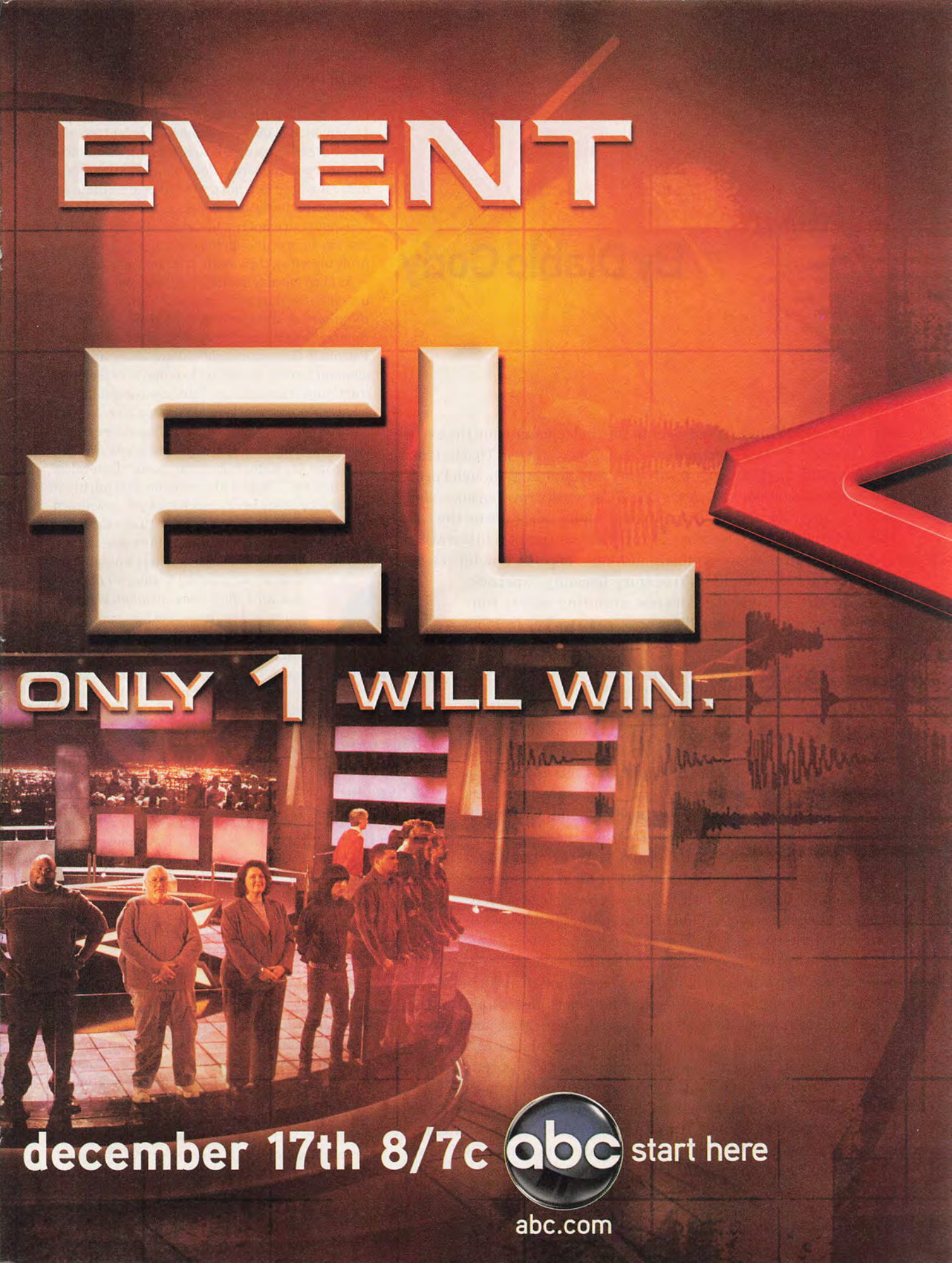
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BINGE THINKING

LIFE ON THE ROAD

By Diablo Cody

I have seen *Almost Famous*—both the theatrical cut and the extra-crunchy "Bootleg" incarnation—a total of 11½ times. (That last time I was only partially cognizant of my surroundings, though I probably still sang along to "Fever Dog.") Cameron Crowe's gauzy valentine to arena rock and long-stemmed groupies made life on the road seem achingly sweet. The cross-country adventures of William Miller and Penny Lane have always made me long to hop on a tour bus, chemical toilets notwithstanding. (True story: Recently I was backstage at the Hollywood Awards, standing about four Maddox-lengths from Brad Pitt, when Crowe walked in. I forgot all about Pitt and began palpitating over Crowe in a fit of silent dork hysteria. I couldn't stop staring at his head because I knew *Famous* had unspooled from that very braincase.)

Okay, so knowing how I feel about the ultimate tour flick, you can imagine how torqued I was when I found out I was being sent out on the road to promote the movie I'd written, *Juno*. (Note to cynics: Lest ye assume that this column is a shameless attempt to pimp my flick, rest assured that this ain't no one-off. Actually, I'm EW's newest columnist and will be contributing on a regular basis. Hi.)

But I digress. According to the studio, our press tour would take me, director Jason Reitman, and star Ellen Page all over the U.S. and to a couple of cities in Europe. We'd host screenings, field queries at Q&A's, and do hundreds of interviews in ecru-walled hotel suites. But all I heard was the word "tour." This was my chance to live like a rock star! I'd be like Jason Lee in *Famous*, albeit with less facial hair. I was determined to make the tour as debauched as possible. Never mind that Reitman's idea of a party is Diet Coke and Hot Tamales. I wasn't exactly rolling with Mick and the boys.

A few weeks before departure, an itinerary circulated. My manager phoned me, worried. "I'm looking at your schedule. It's pretty insane." "Whatever, man. The only thing that's going to be insane is my BUZZ. Hey, do you know where I can get embroidered velvet pants?" So off we went to Atlanta. Seattle. Chicago. Toronto. Elsewhere. But a few cities in, I began to notice something disheartening: We—the ostensible "power trio" of Ellen, Jason, and myself—were actually deeply uncool. Every day we'd board a plane, disembark just in time to attend an evening screening, sleep a sensible six to eight hours, then begin another press day. We were cheerful, punctual, professional, and 100 percent groupie-free. No televisions were heaved into swimming pools; no cub reporters were deflowered. Hell, I didn't even order any in-room porn—the idea of a studio accountant perusing the bill was too mortifying. Would you want your employer to know that you couldn't resist the lure of *Bi-Curious Moms IV*? Not that I pride myself on class and discretion, but whatever.

As I had imagined it, life as a touring writer would be a soft-focus gypsy caravan, a multi-city blur of room-service Moët, artfully tousled hipsters, and intimate after-parties where everyone listens to Gram Parsons in the buttery light of dawn. Sadly, my boho-glamour fantasy wound up looking more like week 6 at Camp Winnemucca. I quickly learned that it's hard to look attractive when you live out of a Samsonite. My neglected haircut began to resemble Javier Bardem's man-bob in *No Country for Old Men*. Someone like Kate Hudson can make "disheveled" look hot, but I looked like someone you might see queuing up at the needle-exchange van downtown.

After a while, I was reminded of "Turn the Page," Bob Seger's famous ballad about the rigors of touring. I used to think the Seeg was being a whiny bitch—*Ooh, it's so grueling to camp at the Ritz! And wait, did he just complain about being mistaken for a chick?* But now I was forced to confess to myself that Bob—the ultimate ramblin' gamblin' man—had a point. Life away from friends and family messes with your head, and traveling at warp 10 takes its toll on the body. At one point, I did press in Los Angeles, Spain, Paris, and New York within one hazy 72-hour period. (Yes, it's possible, though I was barely ambulatory in the final stretch. You try introducing a film in Castilian Spanish while battling Buñuel-worthy hallucinations.) While I was peripherally aware of local color outside the confines of the hotel, I was always more familiar with my shower curtain than with my host city.

"This was my chance to live like a rock star! I'd be like Jason Lee in *Almost Famous*, but with less facial hair."

And yet, despite the lack of Zeppelin-era high jinks, this tour hasn't all been Sturm und Drang. I'll never forget the Gijón natives attempting (successfully) to keep me awake by pouring glass after glass of the potent local cider, plying me with prison-strength cigarettes, and dragging me to a disco at 5 a.m. Nor will I soon forget the two guys in Atlanta who drove 75 miles on three separate occasions to see our movie. Best of all, watching audiences on two continents enjoy the film has been the privilege of a lifetime—maybe even cooler than any rock tour. Sure, none of us has dared to pop six quaaludes, climb to a dangerous height, and declare "I am a golden god!" But I guess we're just more comfortable being golden geeks. ■

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